

The

LEVELANDERS

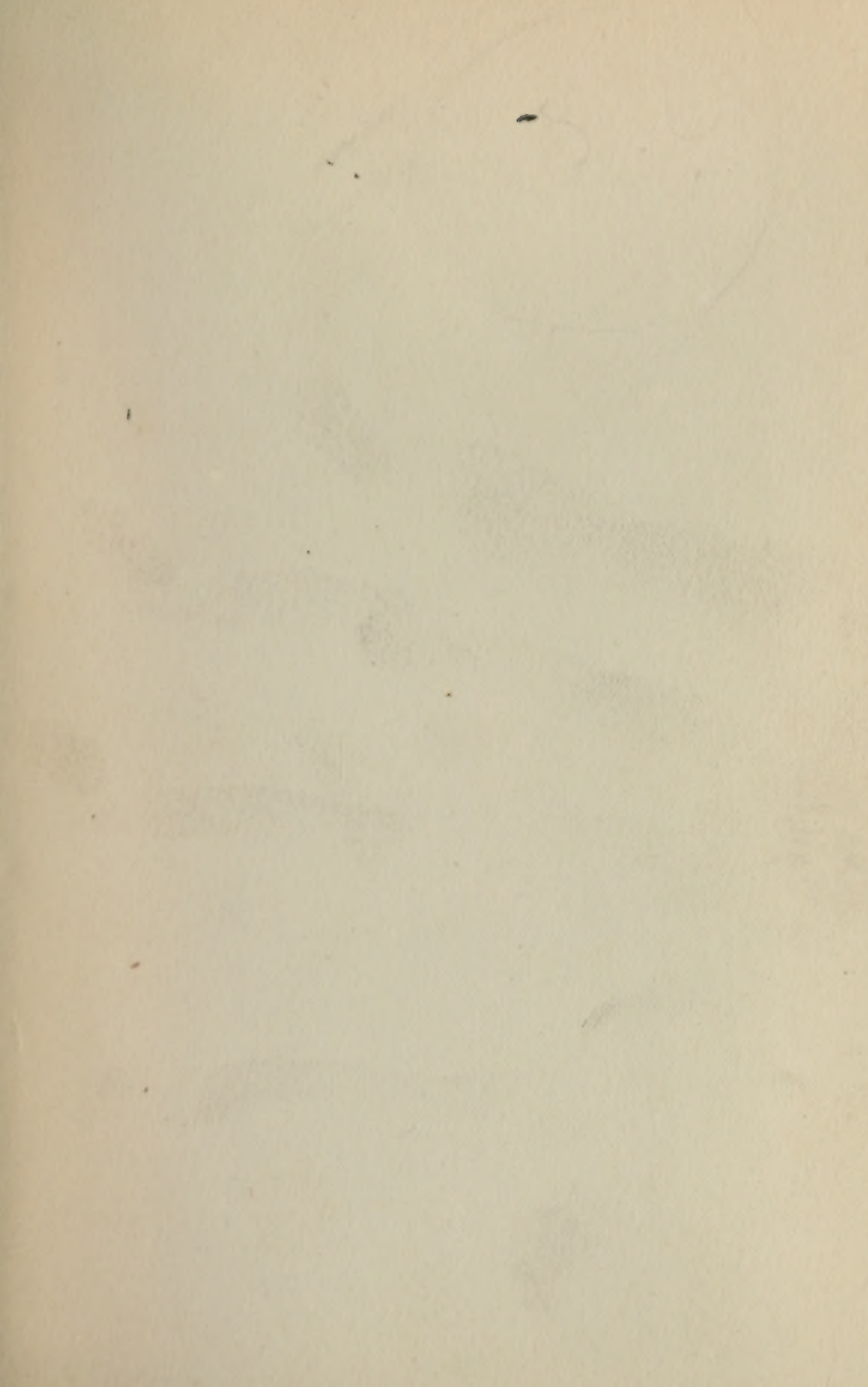
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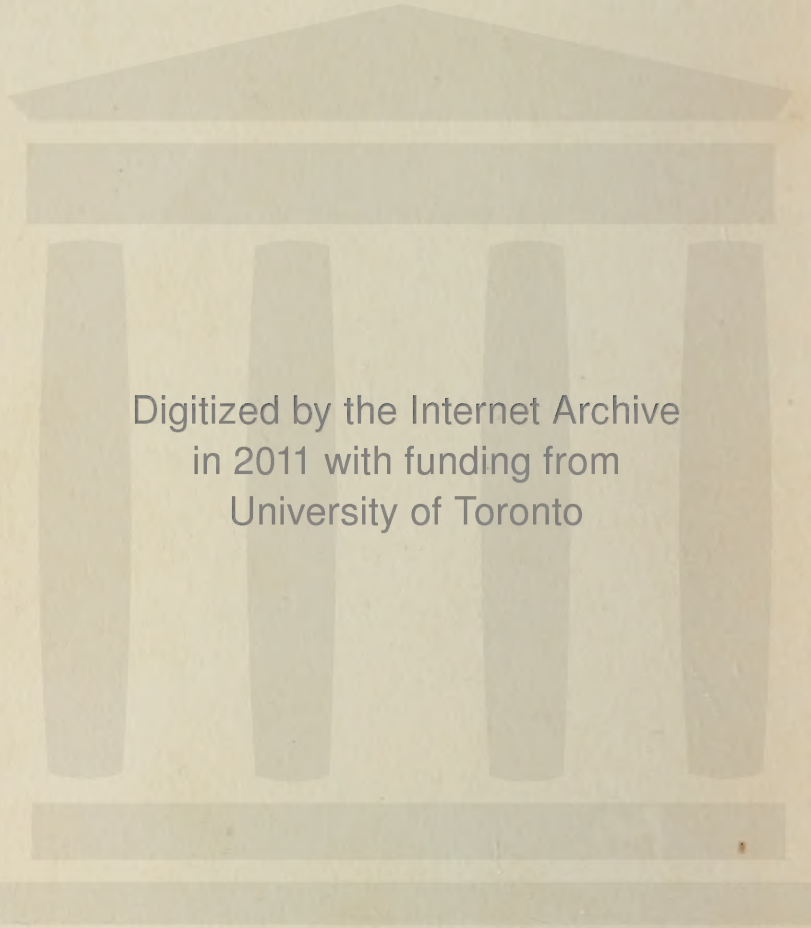


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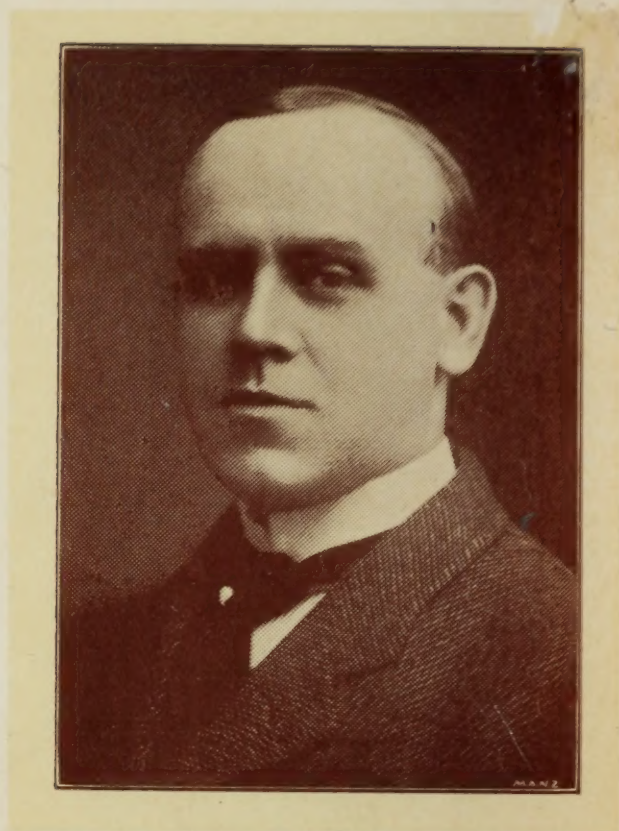
by

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The
CLEVELANDERS

By
ARCHIE BELL

Author of
"A Scarlet Repentance,"
"The Bermudian," &c., &c.



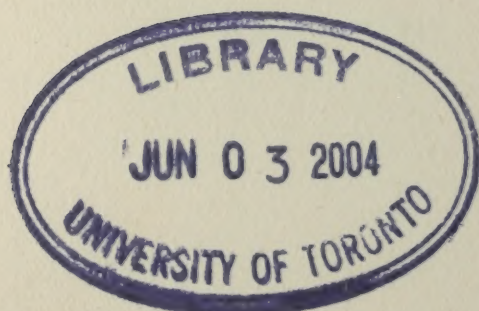
An Exposé of High Life in
the Forest City

BROADWAY PUBLISHING CO.
835 BROADWAY
NEW YORK

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BY

ARCHIE BELL



*“—visiting the iniquities of the fathers
upon the children of the third and
fourth generation—”*

Deuteronomy, V: 9.

THE PURPLE DINNER

Chapter I

THE CLEVELANDERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE PURPLE DINNER.

The "purple dinner" was in honor of Miss Julia Marlowe. It might as well have been "in honor of" Queen Alexandra or Bertha M. Clay, for Miss Marlowe found it "impossible to accept Mrs. Sorghum's very kind invitation," and remained at her hotel. But this did not suggest itself to the hostess as a legitimate reason for recalling her invitations; so the dinner was served "one plate shy," as a society reporter on one of the morning dailies remarked, although her account of the affair in the routine "Notes" was differently phrased. All the others who received the familiar purple envelope, directed with purple ink and scented with violets, were punctual to the minute stated in the invitation. The same batch of letters was always delivered into the custody of Uncle Sam whenever a celebrated person came to town. Usually the celebrity was "otherwise engaged" but "grateful for the honor," when the dinner actually came to pass. What of that? The meal was served to others

and whatever good or evil was to result from the affair had already resulted; the newspapers had published the usual paragraph that "Mrs. Edward Sorghum entertains in honor of Somebody or Other this evening. Plates will be laid for twelve." On almost every occasion eleven plates sufficed but the newspapers made no mention of that, just as they did not on this particular occasion, which was notable in the lives of at least two persons, despite the fact that Julia Marlowe was more interested in the perusal of the latest novel than in the soup and salad prepared by Mrs. Sorghum's cook.

The failure of Miss Marlowe to assist the hostess in obtaining a peculiar social notoriety merely serves to distinguish this particular dinner from a series of similar affairs. It was that night that George Graham first met Marian Longworth, or at least that was the occasion of their formal introduction. Previous to that he had seen her in the office of a friend, on the street, at the theater and in a dozen places perhaps, and in each of them she had appealed to him as the uncommonly vivacious and pretty stenographer that she really was.

At Mrs. Sorghum's dinner she seemed to be playing another role. If she had been attractive and pretty as the stenographer, she was beautiful as a guest in "society." She looked so young and fresh, so innocent, and so different from the rest. The dew-drops seemed to sparkle in her eyes. He was sure that she had come from the country. The flush of wild pink roses was still upon her cheeks. She had the soft, gentle voice

that is bred on the farm and does not readily adapt itself to the noisy hubbub of the city. Her eyes were the soft, azure eyes that seemed to have caught their color from the arched heavens that span harvest fields. Her hair was soft and light and her hands snowy white.

"Such beautiful hands," reflected George Graham, as he glanced at her across the table, unobserved by the others who were busy gossiping.

Such beautiful eyes, lips, and cheeks! Why had he never noticed them before? Could he be mistaken? Was she not the pretty stenographer who cast wistful glances at him as he entered the office of his friend Bartlett? If the same person—and he began to feel the irresistible hope that she were no other—why was she here? How had Mrs. Sorghum, who never thought of anything but her social advancement, so far forgotten herself as to extend an invitation to a mere typist—Mrs. Sorghum, who invited people to her table not for what they really were, nor for what they knew, but for what people said of them?

"That reminds me," said the hostess, as the soup plates were being removed, "I met Cowell Binds and his wife in New York when I was there last week. She said they're having their home refurnished. It's Louis XIV, I believe, this time."

"Louis XIV," laughed the proprietor of the book store. "Very likely. We sent them a ten-volume history of the life and times of Louis XIV the other day."

"What on earth for? Have the Bindses be-

gun to study French history?" laughed the hostess. "I didn't suppose they were readers."

"Readers? Well no, I guess they're not, but they sent down word they had an eighteen-inch space to fill in the library, so we sent them the set of Louis XIV. That may have put the idea of refurnishing into their heads."

"Nonsense! You really don't mean that literally, do you? People wouldn't do that, would they?"

"People would do anything," replied the bookstore man. "Of course it isn't strictly business for me to talk about these things, but they are really too funny. What would you say if I told you that I sold Cowell Binds one thousand books for a library for his new house; no titles mentioned in the deal, no specifications as to the nature or quality of the volumes, except that they must be bound in Morocco which I believe he thought meant bound in the North of Africa."

"Isn't it too pathetic!" chirped Katherine Belmont, who as George Graham's "lady" at dinner, sat at his side and now for the first time since their arrival, addressed a word to him, meaning it to be heard by the others at the table.

"Pathetic, I call it and not at all funny," she continued. "Still, I see the Bindses are guarantors of the symphony concerts. They seem to appreciate good music."

Mrs. Sorghum laughed outright. "Excuse me! It really isn't funny; but granting that the purchase of a library in that way isn't ludicrous, the fact that they patronize music and such things really is hilariously so. Sometimes when I read

the names of patrons and patronesses of unprofitable concerts and what I call 'fudge entertainments' in this town, I wonder if all of them are actually required to write their own names, or if the lady who pulls society by a lot of strings, as an Italian manipulates marionettes, allows them to make their marks. I'm sure that some of their fathers and mothers couldn't have spelled the name of the president of the United States."

"But patronage of these concerts makes them possible and accomplishes some good," replied Miss Belmont emphatically.

"Yes, it bores the subscribers nearly to death," smiled Mrs. Sorghum. "And that reminds me, did you see that the Jensens have gone to New York for the winter? They say she's been snubbed up and down the Avenue by the wives of her husband's political enemies and was positively obliged to pack up and leave. Funny society in this town, not in the least metropolitan."

"Well what was she before she married him, anyway?" asked Mrs. Dupeer, daughter of the hostess, who with the others had quietly listened without a chance to speak. "She was a nobody socially until Jensen picked her up and attempted to get her into our set by reason of his political standing in the community. She is getting just what she should expect."

"But she gets on very well in New York," remarked the son of the banker who sat next to her. "I've seen her name in the *Herald* several times."

"That's easy," sniffed Mrs. Sorghum. "It's easier to get a little recognition where none

knows you, than in a community where your next door neighbor knows more of your own business than you do yourself."

So on and on ran the conversation. It was tinged with malice and petty jealousy. Those who talked the most, ate most. Those who were silent, cast meaning grimaces back and forth across the table. It was the same old story to them; if they accepted Mrs. Sorghum's hospitality, they were obliged to listen to her inane chatter, and the gossip that always budded bloomed, and went to seed at her dinner table. A well-cooked meal and the vain satisfaction derived from seeing their names in the weekly society journal as Mrs. Sorghum's guests—from the list furnished by Mrs. Sorghum herself—was their compensation for the hours thus wasted.

In the drawing-room an hour later, a pianola was put into commission and the general conversation became inaudible. George Graham had anticipated this and conveniently seated himself beside Marian Longworth.

"I'm sure I've seen you often, but I can't just remember where," he ventured.

"I've seen you often and I can remember perfectly just where," she replied, smiling innocently, yet suspiciously, he thought.

"Certainly not here!"

"Certainly not; I have never been here before."

"At the theater, perhaps," he suggested, knowing that she read his thoughts.

"I seldom go to the theater."

Graham pressed her no further. He realized

that she was not so easily led into a trap of lies by a little flattery as Katherine Belmont had always been.

"You come occasionally to Mr. Bartlett's office?" she asked playfully.

"Yes, occasionally."

Just then Katherine Belmont came up to them. Appearing not to notice Marian, she said abruptly: "George, you really must sing. Heaven knows it's bad enough, but it's better than that pianola. Come and I'll play your accompaniment. Mrs. Sorghum's trying to coax Mrs. Vord to sing, but she never will until she feels that she's putting someone else in the shade, so come along and we'll do the necessary."

Holding out her hand to George she turned to Marian: "Awful bore these affairs."

"On the contrary, I find them most enjoyable," replied Marian courteously.

"But you've never been here before."

"No, I go out very little."

"Fortunate girl! Come on Georgie. Sing your worst—it will be as good as your best."

She swept away towards the music room where three or four of the guests sat smoking cigarettes.

"I shall be so glad to hear you sing," said Marian softly. "I have often heard of your beautiful voice."

"Katherine says it's a terrible voice."

"She must be mistaken, for all of my friends say otherwise."

"I shall be in Bartlett's office tomorrow," added George, as he arose to go to the piano, where

he saw Katherine shuffling a pile of music and watching each move he made.

"So soon again?" she asked coquettishly.

"And the next day and the next—perhaps," he added. "Listen to the words of the song I sing first."

Katherine was already seated at the piano and drummed a few chords as the guests ceased talking and faintly applauded.

"What have you there?" he asked bending over her shoulder and glancing at the music.

"Brahm's 'Staendschen.'"

"But I can't sing that."

"As well as you sing anything else, Georgie. Really, you are getting too particular! Come on."

She banged the piano with the opening notes, while he looked through the titles of the stack of music on a stand at the side.

"Here we are; *'Drink to me only with thine eyes.'*"

"One will be as bad as the other," she said with a laugh that was almost vicious. "Georgie, you're really getting to be sentimental."

He began to sing and everyone listened with rapt attention. Even Katherine realized that he was singing better than usual. The little company gave him a rousing encore, Marian clapped her hands gently and smiled her approval when he looked towards her. Mrs. Sorghum begged for another selection.

"We have some friends waiting for us at the theater; we really must go," said Katherine, approaching the hostess.

"Let them wait and give us just one more selection," pressed Mrs. Sorghum. "George, you haven't sung so well in years."

"Eight o'clock already, my dear," gushed Katherine, glancing at the big clock. "We promised to be at the theater at eight."

"Shall we see you again?" asked the hostess. "You leave day after tomorrow? Do run in a minute if you can."

"Really going are you Katherine?" asked the banker's son.

"Yes really!" she said with an air of martyrdom. "They say Florida is fearfully dull this year!" She looked at George who was quite unmoved, his thoughts being elsewhere.

"Do write and tell us all about yourself!" said Mrs. Sorghum, as she extended her hand. "Come in before you go if you can. George, you must call in, too. Oh Katherine, it is really cruel to leave George here in this lonesome city. You should insist upon his going."

"Business," he protested gently.

"Oh you men," gushed the hostess. "You always think of business first and of us poor women afterwards."

After everyone had said some formal word of farewell, a pretended regret that Katherine was going away and a jest about George's melancholy days to come, they left to keep their engagement at the theater.

"She'll be safe enough in Florida," laughed Mrs. Dupeer, as soon as the doors were closed. "You know she's going with the Grahams. That

would take most of the pleasure out of going to Paradise."

"It's safer for George," sneered Mrs. Sorghum. "He's actually her slave so far as his devotion goes. She can wind him around her little finger."

"It's all his mother and not George," said another guest. "I know the whole story. Mrs. Graham has engineered this affair from start to finish. When she first set eyes on Katherine Belmont, she said to herself; 'there's the girl that's going to be George's wife,' and she carried out her promise to herself. It's all done but the invitations, the presents, and the congratulations."

Just then Mrs. Vord expressed her willingness to sing, the hostess having exhausted all sorts of entreaties for her to do so.

George Graham and Katherine Belmont were driving rapidly down the Avenue.

"Do you suppose I wanted to hear you sing? Do you suppose I wanted to touch her old piano?" she was saying. "No, I asked you to sing because I could see you were making a fool of yourself over that pretty face. It was an insult to me! You know Mrs. Sorghum's crowd. You know how they talk! I'll wager they're laughing at me now, because I was apparently so blind that I couldn't see that your head was completely turned by the face of an innocent farmer's daughter, who has apparently become weary of farm innocence and has come to town to fool you men. Oh, don't tell me! I know them. I could name

a dozen of them. Several played the game badly and came to grief. That's what will happen to this silly fool; you mark my word. And mark this also: if you ever insult me like that again before people, I'll embarrass you as I was embarrassed and humiliated tonight. You haven't got a country lassie in Katherine Belmont. Both of us have fooled your father and mother; but now George, it would be really too silly; don't you attempt to fool yourself! You belong to a different generation."

The carriage door was opened, and ere he had a chance to reply they were both in the lobby of the theater, where their friends awaited them. Katherine looked even more beautiful than usual. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes snapped with fire.

"Another purple dinner and you know what that means," she said by way of apology. "The customary talk, talk—oh, such a bore—and so hard to get away!"

Katherine glanced about her at the people standing in the lobby. Many of them bowed, others stared at her almost impertinently, she thought; and then finally her eyes met those of the wealthy young man who married his father's stenographer, now a matronly looking woman, who stood chatting with two other women. Katherine bowed to him and he may have noticed that her eyes seemed to linger in their gaze towards him.

Since the moment that she had seen the fascinations of Marian Longworth at the dinner

table, and her powers of attraction for George, she hated not only Marian, but all stenographers—and all women who had been stenographers. For that reason she purposely snubbed the wife of the millionaire, as the strains of the orchestra prompted them to pass on to their boxes.

THE AMERICAN RIVIERA

Chapter II

CHAPTER II.

THE AMERICAN RIVIERA.

It was a strange crowd into which Katherine Belmont fell when she went to Florida. While at home in Cleveland she had been indiscreet and she knew it, but she took pride in concealing the fact. At the Florida hotels she soon found that so-called "indiscretion" was necessary to get on socially; and away down deep in her heart she was longing for another conquest. She had moved in a set at home that rarely wandered into the worldly gaities among which she suddenly found herself in St. Augustine. True, she had gone south with the Grahams and they retained the most dignified poise whether at the hotel, driving along the inlet, or sauntering about the streets; but there were plenty of times when they realized that "a young woman should have her pleasures" and on their suggestion rather than her own, she soon plunged into the passionate warfare of the ball-room and veranda, sometimes under the eyes and direction of a chaperon who was renowned for her skill among the "wise" ones, and who was under a suspicious cloud of gossip, although she was attended and flattered by the gilded youths who knew what prizes she frequently snared in the meshes of her

guilt, which passed by the name of "social prominence."

The Grahams were from Cleveland and were thus provincial, or at least were considered so. It was the aim of the elderly lady's life to be "proper." Someone had told her that her ancestors came over in the Mayflower, and although her social enemies usually imagined that they came "steerage," the old lady spent her days in an endeavor to live up to the dignified and puritanical status of mythical ancestors, and made herself miserable in the struggle for rigid decorum. It was this fact that almost prevented Katherine's acceptance of the invitation to spend the winter in the South. According to the plans of the elder Grahams she was to be married to George in the spring. That had been decided in October, and now as January was almost past, the thought of spending the remaining months of her single state under the exacting guardianship of Mrs. Graham, was almost too much to be compensated by whatever pleasure she might find in a trip to the land of flowers during the months when it was cold at home.

Her hesitancy on this account was misconstrued by the Grahams, however, and they pressed their invitation almost to forcing her acceptance. She finally did accept and accompanied by the two, left her friends at home to drift into whatever might await her along the famous East Coast, rumors of what she might expect, having already reached her ears through some New Yorkers whom, the summer before, had been

members of a house-party where she was a guest on one of the beautiful islands of Georgian Bay.

It was a tedious journey to St. Augustine with the old lady and gentleman. Both of them detested traveling and reminded her of the fact each half-hour. She thought it was a bitter taste of what awaited her when they reached their destination; but when the traveling clothes had been laid aside and after a promenade on the piazza, in the natural course of which came a chat with guests at the great hotel, the elderly pair suggested to their guest that she enter into the festivities of the occasion as quickly and as much as possible.

It was a matter of gratification to them that Katherine suddenly became the center of any group into which she was introduced. They considered her a rare capture for George, the person of all the earth worthy of him. His doting mother whispered: "A good thing that George isn't a jealous man, Katherine, a good thing," when she observed the eagerness of the young men to shower their attentions upon the dashing young brunette from the North.

"Would it look just right, Mrs. Graham? Are you perfectly certain that it is just right for me to allow others to escort me,—when, well when George isn't here? Do you think he would be willing to have me do so—would he desire it?"

"What were his last words, my dear?" replied the mother, looking into the beautiful eyes, that had so influenced the son, when Katherine looked at him and exercised her tact.

When Katherine clasped George's hand and

said goodbye at the station, the father and mother passed along into the Pullman, at the suggestion of the latter, and allowed the lovers to have their word of farewell alone.

"Have the best time of your life," said George. "I shall not be silly and ask you not to look at another man while you are away. Write me a note every day; that's all I ask of you. As for the rest—well, do everything and anything that will make you happy. Next time you go away—well next time, I'll be going too."

She smiled almost saucily, as he clasped her hand tightly and he leaned forward to kiss her cheek.

"I have asked mother to do all she can to let you run about with the younger crowd down there. You wouldn't enjoy the gossip of the dowagers?" George Graham forced a smile.

Katherine bit her lip but realized it would be silly to say what she thought.

"Let me," she mused, repeating his words to his mother as he had recited them. "The silly fool; he doesn't know how free I am to do just as I choose. 'Let me'—yes I guess she will *let* me go with the younger crowd!"

He saw her countenance change, after his word of parting, but he thought it was caused by the emotion of the moment, the pang that leaving him had caused.

"Goodbye, my dear," he whispered as the train was about to start and a moment later kissing her again.

"Goodbye, George," she replied, at the same

time noticing his mother watching them from the car window.

The engine puffed and the train moved slowly out of the station. George Graham returned to his office on Euclid Avenue, and Katherine Belmont started on the trip that was to be the turning point of her life.

BREAKING INTO SOCIETY.

Chapter III

CHAPTER III.

BREAKING INTO SOCIETY.

In the Moorish parlor of the Ponce De Leon hotel Katherine was sitting on a divan drinking tea and listening to the words of a stout woman known at the hotel as Madam Du Laurence. After a few words, carefully selected, she had succeeded in convincing Mrs. Graham that she was the proper person to introduce Miss Belmont to the "best people" then in the city. Knowing her trade well and possessing a marked degree of cleverness, when she endeavored to foist herself upon a new-comer, she had impressed the Grahams with the belief that she was the only woman who moved in the exclusive circles to whom was allowed the privilege of discriminating between the new arrivals, as to who should and should not be admitted to the pleasure of the season's festivities.

"Can you believe, my dear, that I actually had applications for you, three of them, the day you arrived at the hotel?" asked the woman with a frankness that jarred the nerves of one so well poised as Katherine.

"Applications?" she asked betraying a shock.

"Actually applications—three of them. Your face you know, it was your face that did it."

The dowager leaned back and leisurely sipped her tea.

"I believe I don't understand," whispered Katherine, quickly glancing around with the nervous fear that someone might have heard.

"Oh yes you do, dear, you understand! I could tell the moment I saw you that you are not one of the—what do you Americans call it?—the 'goody-goody' kind. You don't care to sit and read the Bible all day—eh?" The old woman laughed inwardly and outwardly in a manner almost repulsive to the one with whom she was speaking.

"But I believe you don't understand me then," said Katherine, hesitating. "That is, I believe we misunderstand one another. This 'application' what do you mean by that?"

Madame winced at the pointed demand for an explanation, but with a meaning gesture sought to repair whatever error she had committed by adding: "Merely my way of expressing it, my dear; merely my way of telling you that the young men in our set here at the hotel—and that means really three of the best catches in the country—are actually insanely anxious to meet you. 'Madame you must introduce me,' said the first, as we sat talking and saw you and the Grahams arrive. 'Come out on the veranda and see her' said another, when you made your first appearance with the old lady who tells we that she is soon to become your mother."

Madame smiled as she made the last reflection, then continuing:

"Then, when you went to dinner last night,

you remember the young man sitting opposite you at the table? Well, he has lost his head,—completely lost his head. After dinner he came to me like a young Lochinvar and told me that it must be to-day or never. He talked like a man in the melodrama. But believe me, my dear, there are a dozen girls in the hotel who would give a mortgage on their souls for the least little attention from him.”

“Which one is he?” Katherine asked instinctively, as the woman hesitated.

“Oh you are interested, then?” taunted the latter patronizingly.

Katherine was chagrined that she had so easily admitted she was anxious to participate in anything like a flirtation with the handsome youth who had caught her fancy the moment she saw him.

“He’s the jolliest chap at the hotel,” commented the madam. “A little fast, perhaps—yes, I dare say the Grahams would consider him positively rapid, even wicked perhaps—but what does it matter? People don’t come to Florida hotels in winter to attend a revival. Believe me, my dear, when I tell you that I have wintered in Egypt, at Biskra, and on the Riviera; I have summered in Russia and Norway, in Japan as well as at Newport, Saratoga and all those places where people go to be amused. I have mingled with all the society people of the earth, Russians, French, German and English—and that reminds me, you must meet the Turk, Ben Amid Bey—he is here at the hotel enroute around the world. Ah those Turks! They take a look at you and

if you don't suit their fancy, they will insult you. If you catch their fancy, they want to carry you off to Constantinople for their harems, and the stupid creatures seem never to think that the woman has a thing to say about it. But thank the Lord, you American girls have a will of your own and you know how to get what you want, and I don't believe that even a Turk could change your minds. But as I was remarking, I never have seen a lot of people who for a continued round of pleasure would match this aggregation in Florida. They are different than people in any other part of the world. Take the ordinary English resort and people are contented to smoke, drink, and wear fine clothes. In Russia it is much the same. In Germany the social routine is even more limited. Along the Riviera there are so many English women nowadays that the good old customs of the past have almost entirely given way to the whims of the London season. The English girl with her cigarette and the matron with her glass of whiskey seem to be perfectly satisfied. They are satisfied in their own conceit—and Heaven help them! What is there for them in life? But it's all different here, so different in Florida; and that's just why I'm here. I know, yes, I have positive information that at least eight men of fortune are here actually looking for wives. The young man at your table is one of them. Paul Mentor is his name. They say he owns a whole town in Nevada. His father was known as the great "Zinc King" and was reputed to be one of the richest men west of the Rocky mountains. Oh you can't blame

people for coming to Florida, my dear, and yet you tell me that you only came to please Mrs. Graham, the old lady whom you say will some day be your mother. Ah, my dear, she brought you to the wrong place, you———”

“It is all a riddle to me, this talk of yours. Pardon me, Madame, but I do not understand. I———”

“There he comes now,” whispered the woman.

“Who?”

“Why, the Frenchman, De Goncourt. I told him we would be here; but see how he assumes to be surprised!”

The woman spoke in an undertone, at the same time bowing to greet a tall, slim, young man who was dodging behind palms to make his appearance more sudden, when, as he imagined, he would take Katherine by surprise.

“Ah, we were just speaking of you,” said Madame Du Laurence, completely shattering his plan. “But you are a little late.”

Alphonse De Goncourt quickly came up to them and bowing gracefully, saluted the speaker, although his eyes were fixed on Katherine.

“Delighted, Madame, delighted to see you—and in such charming company.” He forced a smile, although Katherine gave him a surprised and chilly glance that caused him to catch his breath.

“There now,” laughed the woman, endeavoring to relieve the awkward situation, and slightly touching Katherine on the arm. “You see he did not come to see me! Miss Belmont, please

permit me to introduce Alphonse de Goncourt of Paris,—poet, novelist, artist, pianist,—and—”

“I salute Miss Belmont,” interrupted de Goncourt, reaching for her hand, which she graciously extended over the side of the tea-table.

“Will you sit down?”

He had already taken a seat between the two and had motioned a waiter to bring another cup of tea.

“No more for me, no more for me,” said the woman, rising. “I promised to drive at just this hour and I must be going—and—” She hesitated with a glance at Katherine. “I see that you did not come here to take a cup of tea alone with me. Goodbye, dear; I shall see you at dinner.”

She lifted Katherine’s hand gently and then taking up her gloves, started away.

“Madame does not remain long after I come,” said de Goncourt, in a careless sort of way that proved he had no feeling in her quick departure, except one of pleasure, although he wished to be at least civil to the woman who had served him often and well.

“No, not long,” laughed Madame, “I have so many engagements, so many, my dear; and listen, you two,—mark what I say, we do not die when we have grey hairs. You understand? There is a gentleman outside waiting for me. A gentleman, mind you, and he has a few gray hairs of his own, but mind you, he is a gentleman. Ah yes, most of us must be contented thus, for there are not enough of you youngsters to go around.”

"May we escort you to the port cochere?" he asked.

"We?" repeated Madame Du Laurence, smiling.

"Why, yes, Miss Belmont and I?"

"Already?" laughed the woman. "Oh, Goncourt, you are a wonder, a marvel—a very devil of a man!"

Pointing her gloved hand at him with a coquettish gesture, she slipped behind the palms and disappeared down the promenade.

"A dear, good woman is Madame," continued de Goncourt.

"You think so?" asked Katherine, playfully toying with her tea cup, as she lifted it to her lips, and then suddenly hesitated. "You think so really? Well, then, let us drink to the health of Madame Du Laurence."

She gave the signal for him to raise his cup, which he quickly did, saying: "Yes, yes, it is only tea, we will drink to Madame Du Laurence."

Katherine placed her cup on the table without tasting the tea, and feigning indignation replied:

"Why, because it is only tea?"

"Because, Miss Belmont, because if it were wine, soft, bubbling amber fluid from my native hills, I should drink to your health, the health of a northern rose transplanted into its native South."

Katherine flushed. In her heart she was pleased by the flowery tribute of the Frenchman. She did not fancy that he was sincere, but his

insincerity was coated with a neat flattery that was pleasing to her.

"You Frenchmen—" she resumed, and hesitated, for he leaned forward and motioned her to turn quickly.

"Yes, I can imagine what you are going to say about the Frenchmen," he interrupted. "But we are not so bad as the Turks. See down the corridor there, over the fountain, that's Ben Amid Bey. A relative of the Sultan the papers say."

"Do you know I believe I should like the Turks," remarked Katherine with poor tact. De Goncourt forced a smile. "She is bold at least," he mused and added:

"Pardon, Miss Belmont, a thousand pardons. I should not have spoken of him. It's forbidden to mention the Turk, I believe; but he moves in our set, this man Bey, and hoping that you will honor that circle by your presence, I thought it my duty to mention him, to tell you just who he is and let you know how he stands."

He stopped suddenly to study the effect of his words, but Katherine seemed to be studying the man who had uttered them.

"But let us not talk of strangers," he added apologetically.

"Because we are strangers?" she asked.

"Pardon, but we are not strangers. Ah no, not we!"

"Isn't he handsome," said Katherine, purposely referring again to the Turk, whom she fancied was watching them, although he stood gossiping with a circle of men who had just started to leave the tea-room.

"To a woman probably, yes," he answered.

"In being so, then has he not accomplished the sole purpose of being handsome? He could scarcely be handsome to the eyes of men, those jealous brothers of his who ape his successes and follow his eccentricities?"

"Yes—the Turk, remember the unspeakable Turk," replied de Goncourt sullenly.

"I shall remember him," laughed Katherine. "You know a woman always remembers a handsome man."

"But must she always speak about it?" he asked with an air of annoyance.

"Not always, no; except when it is forced upon her mind by comparison—"

"Let's not quarrel, Miss Belmont," he said almost pleadingly. "I have waited a long time for this moment, just to be alone with you."

"Since yesterday," she teased.

"No, no, pardon Miss Belmont, but long ago. It was yesterday that I first heard your voice and although you were speaking to another, your words were for me. I turned suddenly and it was you! It was the face that I had seen in my day dreams."

"Day dreams," repeated Katherine, with a toss of the head. "Day dreams, ah, I understand. You dreamed of me?"

"Yes, yes, I swear it, Miss Belmont, I long ago saw a picture. It was in the salon of one of my Paris friends. 'An Idyl of the West,' he called it, and around that picture we have sat for hours, dreaming, chatting, smoking and drinking. Years ago I swore to find the original of

that 'Idyl of the West.' But I searched in vain. I have crossed the plains of America and Canada, Miss Belmont; I have toured the West, up and down, here and there, like a bird I fluttered about, not knowing where to alight and where to build my nest."

Katherine laughed saucily, he thought; but he was ardently beseeching her to give him attention. It was the first time during his long American tour that he had been unable to command the attention of any young woman, and he was straining every nerve to win in this effort which seemed futile.

"I repeat it, Miss Belmont, my life for the past year, has been like the flight of a bird."

"A French bird," smirked Katherine.

"Yes, a French bird, if you choose. I have gone from north to south and from east to west. My flight has been with and against the winds."

"That's what ruffled your plumage; it was flying against the wind?"

"That's why I have not the silly golden-cage look of the Turk, perhaps. You catch my meaning? You know the bird in the cage is the Idyl of Turkey, Miss Belmont. You understand?"

"Perhaps, yes, but not fully." Katherine grew more serious for the moment.

"The unspeakable race from the Bosphorus! Remember what I say when you speak with him and when you hear his honeyed words of compliment."

"Oh you forget, no, no, it will not be me, he will not speak to me."

She sneered softly, shrugged her shoulders,

sipped the last of the tea from her cup, and as if about to suggest a departure, took up her parasol and gloves.

"You see him coming this way," muttered de Goncourt.

Katherine turned instinctively and observed Ben Amid Bey, starting towards them, his eyes catching hers, as she glanced around.

"Shall we wait?" she asked.

"Shall we? Would you go now that he has accepted your invitation?"

"You saw, then? Oh, strange isn't it, that the peoples of the world speak strange languages, but they all understand the meaning of a glance, a nod of the head, or—perhaps you will not agree with me—the flash of a thought?"

"I agree perfectly, Miss Belmont. That man's thoughts overpower and control women. Were I an experimenter in black magic I might remain and see the spell that he will cast over you. Being a man with a heart for that which is beautiful I prefer to go."

Katherine bowed her head for a moment. His last words caught her attention. They were manly. The man who was slowly sauntering along towards them suddenly caused her to fear him. The impertinence of his flirtation suddenly dawned upon her.

"Will you escort me to the veranda?" she asked, rising. He was startled, as he saw her determination, which he construed to be his own conquest.

"Thank you, Miss Belmont," he said softly. "My arm."

The two walked beneath the palms and were quickly beyond sight of the man who had been the topic of their conversation.

"A devil of a chap that Alphonse," mused Ben Amid Bey, as he puffed his cigarette and watched the two pass from sight. Then he turned about to return to the parlor. There he looked for Madam Du Laurence, mentally planning a campaign, which must begin with a word of flattery, a bank-note, and the promise of something better, as a reward for her services, if she were able to turn the tide of fortune which seemed to be passing from the relative of the Sultan to the scion of an "old but penniless house of France."

BEAUTIFUL BISCAYNE BAY.

Chapter IV

CHAPTER IV.

BEAUTIFUL BISCAYNE BAY.

The jolly tourists who had formed themselves into a clique at the Ponce de Leon went to Miami on the same day. The Grahams found it necessary to go further South, owing to the cold nights. Katherine was obliged to accompany them, and the minds of the remaining members of the party were suddenly bent upon going to Biscayne Bay, when it became known that "the Idyl of the West" was preparing to make the journey. Alphonse de Goncourt had applied the title to her, when raising the glass at the table about which his friends were seated on the night of the day when he sat in the tea-room with Katherine Belmont and told her of his vision of her in a Parisian salon, which he had been devotedly and passionately following in foreign lands until he beheld her enter the hotel with the elderly couple from Ohio. Others in the little crowd of merry-makers, flushed with wine, yet keen and sensitive to the appropriate appellation, had adopted it forthwith; and after that first night when all had become well acquainted—as acquaintanceship goes at such a place—the male members of the party had spoken of "The Idyl" in an almost reverent tone that conveyed her status among the men who were jealously guard-

ing each word or attention she chose to bestow upon them.

Madame Du Laurence was proud of her "discovery." She considered it a "good season's work," and although she had received liberal pay from her male patrons for introducing the girl from Ohio, she kept close to her "business associates," as she called them, eager to grasp another dollar or to enter into any of the festivities planned by the young men in honor of Katherine Belmont, but enjoyed as much by the others as by the young woman herself.

Katherine confided in Madame and told her everything. The reserve—almost aversion—which she had felt for the woman who ventured so boldly at first, soon wore off. The two were constantly together and their companionship was encouraged by the Grahams. Madame Du Laurence was more tactful with the pious Mrs. Graham than she had been with the budding beauty on whom her attentions and affections centered.

Mr. Graham was not entirely ignorant of what was plainly apparent to more seasoned tourists, but he readily assented to each inquiry from Katherine as to whether or not she should be seen so frequently in the company of the elderly dame who seemed so well known among all people into whose company she fell. To his mind Madame Du Laurence was a trifle fast. That a woman of her age should evidence such keen delight in the pleasure of the younger set was strange to him but he was delighted that Katherine had been singled out of the hotel guests by this woman of experience; and although he

thought it remarkable at times that the two should plan long excursions up rivers, on the ocean, and into the country, he was satisfied that Katherine seemed to be enjoying herself, while he and his wife were left to their quiet amusements, reading, walking and driving, and had no care for the pleasure or entertainment of their guest, who, chaperoned by Madame Du Laurence, gave them no cause for suspicion as to what was actually taking place.

After breakfast one morning at the Ponce, Katherine hurried to the apartments of Madame and with much agitation told her of the Graham's sudden determination to go further South.

"Good," ejaculated the woman. "I could be ready in an hour. Besides, I'm weary of St. Augustine, dear, very weary of it. Only last night I was wishing that we might go further South. But life at Miami is so very dull unless—" she stopped suddenly and after hesitating a moment, nodded her head with an air of assurance, having observed that Katherine caught her thought.

"They certainly will go, dear," she added with a gesture. "Leave you here? No, no, they would follow you to Arabia."

She laughed heartily and seemed to enter into the plans for departure with much enthusiasm.

"But the Grahams," said Katherine. "What can we tell them? The dear old soul told me this morning with tears in her eyes that she regretted to take me away from the scene of so much enjoyment. Now, fancy what will she think, when she hears that we are not to move into the desert after all, and that—"

"Leave that to me," interrupted Madame. "I'll tell the poor old soul that we had planned to go to Miami on the very day that you are going, long before we heard of your unexpected departure."

"Is there any question," sighed Katherine—"any question that our plans might not carry?"

"Not in the least, dear, not in the least. Leave that to me, and mind you, I will have my little sport out of it too. I will have my gallant gentlemen on the rack. They shall hear from me that you have suddenly determined to go away from here. They will ask me where, but will I know? No, I shall not know, dear, but I will promise them to endeavor to ascertain. I shall send them away with heavy hearts and when they come back to me, they will implore me to give them an answer. I will play with them, mock them and torture them—and then, ah, when I tell them that they may go too, they will fall on their knees, call me their guardian angel and end by inviting me to accompany the party. Oh my dear, I know how to manage all that and we shall have many jolly days and nights ahead."

"But Madame," said Katherine doubtfully, "what if—oh what if he should not implore and plead, what if he should be resigned to it and decide to remain here? What if he should not go to Miami?"

"He!" questioned Madame sternly, "I was saying 'they'—which one is 'he'?"

"Oh Madame you know! You are not blind; it seems you have eyes in the back of your head and can see in the dark."

"But that doesn't answer my question—and I never asked you before—I have just looked on and endeavored to find out for myself. Which one, dear, which one do you care for most?"

Katherine hesitated and tried to frame an answer.

"Alphonse?" asked Madame.

Katherine shook her head.

"Not the Turk?"

"No, although I do fancy him."

"Who then? You do not mean Martin, Allen, Burton,—or—Mon Dieu! it has just dawned on me, dear, you do not mean Henriques?"

Katherine smiled, but trembled when she heard the last interrogation, her hands twitched nervously and she dared not reply.

"Well, well," growled Madame, "now that is a surprise, and when you surprise Madame Du Laurence, my dear, you rise early in the morning. But Heaven save you, if I ever dreamed of such a thing! You met him last night, dear, you were with him how long? An hour?"

"But such an hour, Madame, oh such an hour!"

"Who is he, anyway?" asked the woman with a sneer.

"From Brazil, he said," replied Katherine. "Portugese, I believe, and oh so handsome, Madame, he is such a dear. He told me such a pretty story of his father and mother last night. They lived in Brazil when they were children; then their parents moved to Mexico and settled on adjoining plantations, I believe, or at least in the same vicinity. There they made their great

fortunes, the two families, I mean, and when at what we would consider a 'tender age' the two youngsters were married. Oh Madame, it was romantic and interesting—the contracts were drawn up and signed by the two fathers and all that sort of thing and—”

“Nothing particularly romantic in that, was there, my dear?” interrupted Madame Du Laurence.

“Perhaps not just exactly romantic, but it was pretty, wasn't it now? I mean that childhood play developing into a real engagement and a real marriage—”

“Looks to me as if the fathers made the engagement,” snapped the woman who wished Katherine to see that she did not approve of her choice among the men she seemed to have at her disposal.

“Custom, Madame, it is the custom in Mexico and Brazil,” answered the young woman, by way of explanation.

“Mon Dieu, plague the customs!” shouted Madame, who was no longer able to suppress her anger. “I don't like people who cater so miserably to what other people do and what they say must be done. Is it right to do anything just because a certain number of the people say it is right? Is it wrong because people say it is wrong? Oh my dear, you are not so sensible as I have believed, if you take must stock in what people think of things. Take my advice and do what you want to do—then don't squeal at the consequences. Isn't that what you Americans call 'squealing'? I believe it is. I've heard them

talk about the 'squealers' at Monte Carlo and Baden—and I suppose they mean the folks who can't take a disappointment. They think they are independent, at least they say they are, and they launch out boldly to set the world on fire, but when they make a failure of it, they can't take it philosophically, even gracefully. Just take me as an example, I wouldn't recommend myself to most people for they would consider me a failure. But you do not belong to the many; you belong to the few, so you can profit by a little experience in watching me. I don't care for the conventionalities, and verily, my dear, verily I have prospered."

Katherine saw that Madame was endeavoring to evade the topic forced by her own questioning, but which had been distasteful to her, owing to the answer she received. Unwilling to allow the subject to pass, however, she returned to it, and without beating around the bush, asked pointedly:

"Do you really believe that Mr. Henriques would go further South?"

"Mr. Henriques!" exclaimed the elder woman in a rage.

"Yes, he says he is so very fond of St. Augustine. He really loves it here; the yachting, the hotels and all that sort of thing. I remember he said that he found it difficult to find respectable lodging in so many other southern cities."

"Respectable lodging!" Madame laughed outright. "You mean expensive lodging, my dear, a man like him isn't looking for what people call respectable lodging."

"I mean what he calls respectable—"

"And you and I know perfectly well what that is, eh? Oh my dear, many a poor benighted creature has tumbled into the bottomless pit while on the ostensible search for respectability."

"But would he go with us? That's the question."

"With us? He needn't go with me! To tell you the truth, my dear, to tell you frankly, as you do not appear to guess it unless I speak very plainly, I do not think much of this romantic Brazilian-Portugese, or whatever you say he told you he was. He looks more like an Abyssinian to me, or a half civilized creature from the Congo."

"Oh Madame haven't you noticed his jet black eyes?"

"Haven't I though?"

"His beautiful hair—"

"And greasy face!" smirked the woman.

Katherine stopped suddenly and hung her head. "You are poking fun at me," she said softly. "You were laughing at me all the time and I was too silly to see it."

"My dear, you seem to place a light appreciation upon what I have done to make your visit enjoyable,—even tolerable."

"On the contrary, Madame, on the contrary, I—"

"I want no apologies and I want no gratitude either, on second thought. It is the way of the world, we never thank our friends for what they do for us."

"Then you consider me ungrateful?" asked Katherine.

"You are at least thoughtless of—"

"Of what?" demanded the young woman, suddenly rising to leave the room.

"Of my love for you, my dear," replied Madame, quickly placing her arm around Katherine's waist, and caressing her. "We mustn't quarrel, you and I, we have got on so well together, my dear. It would break my heart if you should forget me, forget our little friendship and decide to go away and leave me."

She walked to the other side of the room and burst into tears. She thought the occasion demanded it.

"We shall always be friends Madame," said Katherine affectionately. "You have been so very kind. This is the first time that—"

"It's the first time that I ever heard it from your own lips," shouted the woman.

"Heard what?"

"That you loved a poor vagabond, scarcely able to pay his board and tailor bills."

"Love?" asked Katherine with emotion.

"Yes love," thundered Madame. "Don't you think I can tell? Don't you believe that Madame Du Laurence can read the eyes and thoughts of women, as she can read the eyes and thoughts of men? Blind? Do you think I have lost my sight?"

"Good morning, Madame, and perhaps good-bye. If Mrs. Graham needs me I may not see you again. A thousand thanks for your kindness to me. You have been such a dear, and I am so

very, very sorry, that I have disappointed or offended you."

"Always the way," replied Madame, lifting her shoulders and motioning Katherine towards the door. "You used me to good purpose; now, when you can use me no more, you throw me out with the rubbish—you—"

"No more, Madame, goodbye." Katherine passed out, closed the door gently, and hurried down the corridor fearing that Madam Du Laurence might call her back.

"What an old fool I am," growled Madame to herself, as the door closed and she quickly dried her tears, and walked to the mirror to patch up the stains on her powdered cheeks. "I am fooled in this little whelp of a girl—I—Madame Du Laurence who can lead men around by the nose and command while they obey. I who laugh while men sniffle and weep—I who live by reason of my tact—"

She pressed her finger to her lips when she heard the words escape her. Then on a moment's reflection added:

"A prize—yes they know it and I know it. She is too rare a bird for me to lose. Commanding will not do it, tears will not do it,—what will? Ah," and she smiled with vain satisfaction, as she looked into the mirror, "leave that to me, Madame Du Laurence, you have been in 'tight places before. What did you say about the ones whom the Americans call 'squealers'? You! Ah yes, Katherine Belmont is too good to lose, too good. I must have her back. How? Watch Madame Du Laurence."

With a quick determination she threw a lace shawl over her shoulders and sauntered out on the piazza.

"Beautiful morning, Madame," said a man who arose as she approached.

"Ah Mr. Hendriques—yes delightful isn't it?"

"May I be honored?" he asked, pointing to a porch chair.

"Strange, really remarkable Mr. Henriques, I was speaking of you only a moment ago—"

"Of me—really?"

"Yes"—and Madame smiled, the smile of the satisfied.

"May I ask—?" he hesitated.

"You may," she replied, laughing.

"To whom, then?"

"To my dear friend, Miss Belmont."

"Miss Belmont?"

"Yes."

"And she is your dear friend?"

"Assuredly! Don't tell me that you knew her and didn't know that I am her best friend."

"Oh Madame, you said that I—well, that I was a fair sort of chap, eh? That I was as good as the average—and all that sort of thing?"

"Miss Belmont was not asking for your pedigree. I believe she must have heard some foolish hotel gossip, poor little girl, and she takes such things to heart."

"About me?" eagerly inquired Henriques.

"About you, yes."

"And what did you say, Madame, what did you say?"

"I told her I knew the reports to be canards concocted by jealous enemies."

"You did?" asked Henriques as he reached for her hand to express his gratitude, yet instinctively doubting her sincerity.

"Yes and more," continued Madame. "You know Miss Belmont leaves shortly for Biscayne Bay?"

"No!" ejaculated the youth with surprise and regret.

"Oh yes, didn't she tell you?"

"Not a word. Why on earth is she going to Biscayne Bay?"

"Just a whim, my dear, that's all I believe, although she pretends that old Mr. and Mrs. Graham can't stand the cold nights up here and must go where it's warmer. That's just her pretty little excuse. I know it! I know the little dear so well that I can read her very thoughts."

"As you can read the thoughts of all of us," answered Henriques, ambiguously suggesting a compliment.

"No, not at all," began Madame, as if reflecting. "If I could read all of your thoughts, for instance, I might be able to tell you something that you would really like to know."

"Of course you could," laughed Henriques. "You certainly could tell me a plenty that I would like to hear, if you only would. Just tell me anything about Miss Belmont and that will please me, yes more than you think. Anything at all, just tell me about her."

Madame lowered her eyes and feigned to be

abashed. After biting her lips in her customary manner she said mockingly:

"And still you doubt that I can read your thoughts?"

"Oh, no, no!" ejaculated Henriques, "and even if you could not, I should tell you them just the same. I am willing to make a clean breast of it, I do admire Miss Belmont very much."

"Admire!" repeated Madame scornfully, "Admire! Well who on earth doesn't admire her? You love her my boy, you love her!"

"Well I use that word very seldom, Madame, I think it most too sacred to trifle with in the ordinary affairs of life. In fact I think too well of Miss Belmont to say that I love her—yet. She should have a part in that you know; and if you are her dear friend, Madame, you doubtless know all about it. You know whether or not Miss Belmont cares for me."

He moved in his chair, nervously approaching her and imploring as much by his eyes as actions, for a word that would bid him hope.

"Well, well, my boy, I must be running on," she began, forcing a satirical smile and pretending to rise. "These little affairs, after all, you know, belong to the younger ones. Bless you, I can't advise so I always hold my tongue."

"Please, Madame, please tell me this: when is Miss Belmont going away?"

"Tomorrow."

"To Miami?"

"Perhaps."

"Or Cocoanut Grove?"

"Maybe there."

"Well then, I suppose you go too, Madame? You are going further South with Miss Belmont?"

"Precisely," nodded Madame, as she finally arose and peered through her lorgnette out into the gardens.

"Then you may expect me too," said Henriques with a sudden determination. "I'm tired of this life at St. Augustine and really, I'm glad of something to move me."

"Ah, then you are going to follow the girl you only admire?" she taunted.

"I am going to Biscayne Bay. Great fishing down there you know."

"And hearts for bait, my boy, hearts for bait. You had better not go."

"Why not?" he asked breathlessly.

"Oh my dear boy, if you will force me to tell you, if I must tell you—I think it would be unsafe. It would be uphill business for you; it is not only the case of another—there are several others."

"Yes, yes, I know there are several others," repeated Henriques, calmly reflecting. "But—"

"No my boy," she interrupted, "it would be actually unsafe for you. They are a hot blooded lot, you know, and bless me, your Portuguese blood is not sluggish when once started to fever heat. It would be a battle for the prize, and Heaven help the one who lost!"

"Madam, I am not a coward," declared Henriques melodramatically.

"No, no, I know you are not. Assuredly not—and neither is he, my boy, neither is he!"

She started to walk along the veranda, but Henriques followed closely at her side.

"Who is he, Madame?" he asked teasingly.

"Who? Well, what if I should tell now! Believe me, my boy, she does not care so much for you as she does for him. She is a headstrong little miss—oh, these American girls!—and I am quite unable to persuade her to change her mind—but remember, she does listen to me when I talk."

Madame smiled suggestively.

"Then will you?" he pleaded, and stopped short as she quickly grasped his hand, as if formally bidding him good-day, but in reality clutching it tightly and whispering under-breath:

"For God's sake, here he comes now. Go away quick, I must talk to him."

"Goncourt?" hissed Henriques.

"Yes, yes—" she answered.

"I loathe him!" snarled the youth.

"Yes, you naturally would, my boy, you naturally would! But go along, go, go, trust it to me, I have been teasing you, just trust to me and you will see what I can do for you. Call on me before dinner to-night. Then I will tell you what to do."

Henriques took out a cigarette and doffed his hat to Madame, who had already turned away from him.

"Ah, there you are," he heard her say. "Just the person I wanted to see. Been looking for you everywhere."

Then arm in arm the two sauntered off in the

opposite direction. Henriques turned and saw them disappear around the corner of the veranda.

"Which will she be?" he asked himself, "my best friend or my worst enemy?" as he looked into the rings of the blue smoke exhaling from his nostrils.

NASSAU, THE CITY OF PLAGUE.

Chapter V

CHAPTER V.

NASSAU THE CITY OF PLAGUE.

Two days later, Katherine Belmont, Mr. and Mrs. Graham, Alphonse de Goncourt, Jean Henriques and Madame Du Laurence were all sheltered by the same hospitable roof near Biscayne Bay, thanks to the carefully laid and well executed plans of Madame Du Laurence. And strangely enough the Grahams took it to be a mere co-incidence, "one of the things that show us how small the earth is," the old lady from Cleveland expressed it, as she responded to the greetings of the hotel crowd from St. Augustine.

She shocked even clever old Madame Du Laurence, however, when after a few moments conversation, she announced her regret that they were again to be the ones who separated themselves from the happy company.

"We thought of stopping here until spring," said Mrs. Graham, "but we have decided in favor of Nassau, so we must say 'goodbye' tomorrow morning."

"To the Bahamas?" gushed Madame.

"Exactly!" replied Mrs. Graham. "Bahama Islands looks far better in the Sunday society column than Miami, doesn't it?"

"And you too, dear?" asked Madame of Katherine, whose demeanor she realized had been cold towards her since the leave-taking at the hotel in St. Augustine.

"Oh yes, I shall go!" replied Katherine with a smile, which was intended to soothe the wounded feelings of the questioner, but which failed to accomplish its purpose.

"But you will join us today?" asked young de Goncourt nervously. "We had arranged a trip up the river to the Everglades. Great fishing up there, you know; take a lunch, spend the day and return in time for dinner."

"I'm afraid we shall be too busy, owing to our early departure tomorrow," replied Katherine, glancing towards Mrs. Graham.

"Not at all! We need not touch our trunks; they are ready to send to the wharf—and then besides, you must have one more day with the friends who made you so happy in St. Augustine."

"Yes, you should come with us, my dear, they say it's really interesting up the river," added Madame Du Laurence.

"It would be nice—all of us together," reflected Katherine, glancing towards Henriques.

"Delightful, Miss Belmont, positively delightful. Let us urge you to come."

"You need not urge," she said smiling, "I'll go."

De Goncourt and Henriques scowled at one another and Madame reading their thoughts, quickly suggested that they go to the boat landing to arrange for an early start.

"I've a surprise for you," she smirked, as they were about to depart. "You haven't seen them, and of course you haven't either, Mr. Henriques. Up at Palm Beach early in the year I met a family from Nevada—father, mother—and two daughters, twins, the most startling beauties of this wonderful country. And Mon Dieu, they were the first people I recognized when I reached this hotel. The Carsons, they are such jolly girls—and they are coming with us. Twins, de Goncourt, remember they are twins, you can't tell one from the other—and believe me, you wouldn't if you could, for one is as charming as the other."

Katherine spoke aside to Mr. and Mrs. Graham, both of whom declared that they would prefer remaining in the hotel gardens to going off on an excursion.

"But we will see you off," declared the old lady.

Katherine glanced at Henriques, and then excused herself to go to her room to dress. De Goncourt left for the wharf, Madame Du Laurence and the Grahams sat down on the veranda, leaving Henriques to stroll about in happy anticipation of the day which it seemed to him had been designed by others solely for his pleasure.

While the Grahams and Madame were discussing the strange and unexpected meeting in Miami, so soon after the departure from St. Augustine, he chanced to glance in the direction taken by Katherine. She turned her head and he fancied she beckoned him towards her. Going as quickly as he could without attracting the atten-

tion of the others, he found her waiting, with a hedge of foliage to conceal her from the three who were busy gossiping under the leadership of Madame Du Laurence.

"I wanted one word, Mr. Henriques," she said hesitatingly. "Tell me, why did you come to Miami?"

He hesitated also, being taken unawares by what seemed to him an accusation for his presumption in being a party to what he felt sure Katherine considered a curious plot to dog her footsteps.

"We might as well be plain," she added. "I know it's strange, it's unusual to ask such a question, but tell me—why did you come down here? You told me you disliked southern Florida."

"I do," he replied. "I loathe it."

"Then—?" Katherine smiled the smile that interpreted itself to his heart and mind.

"Because you were here," he whispered, approaching a step nearer and looking into her eyes.

"You care for me then?"

"Only for you! I am living for you—I can't see now how I ever lived without you—but tell me Miss Belmont, why do you ask me at this particular moment? Why do you take me by surprise, why make this a moment of ecstasy when I had almost despaired and when I dare not think that this is more than a dream? How I have pleaded! How I have begged you to care for me just a little, for then it seemed to me I could make you love me."

"But I wanted to see—" Katherine hesitated before going further, endeavoring to weigh her words.

"What?" he asked eagerly.

"If you would come to Miami."

"But now you say you are going away again tomorrow," he remarked with a tone of distrust.

"Yes. We are going to Nassau."

"Another test?"

"Are you going to Nassau?" she asked bluntly.

"Shall I go?"

"Yes."

"Then may I understand—?"

"You have already understood what I considered my duty to the man who says he loves me and whom I can never love. If you would know more, if you want an answer to the question, the question which I deferred answering, see me to-night when we return from the river. Until then do not betray our little secret. Let the others talk or let me go about with them as heretofore and do not mind what I say or do. That man de Goncourt! I fear him. He has been spying on us; I am sure of it. It was well enough before I met you, but now that he sees the folly of his flattery, he is always at Mr. Graham's side and I fear the old man actually believes what he tells him. As for me, I don't care to deceive them any longer. They have been kind to me, but it has been in a rather patronizing way. Today I was led to believe that they actually suspect me. So it is that in a hurry Mrs. Graham and I are going off to the Bahamas. Why? You know as well as I. Mr. Graham is not going. He will

stay behind with Goncourt and the rest. I believe it is the test. We are being watched under the suspicious treachery of men who pretend to be our friends. In the Bahamas all will be different. They tell me it is like the other end of the world, so strange and distant, although only a short voyage from the mainland. If deGoncourt should board the steamer for Nassau, I should not go. If he doesn't go—well then, we shall be together in a strange, strange land with none to annoy and threaten us."

Henriques stood dumb-founded. His lips could not speak, his brain reeled. It was like finding within his grasp the pearl for which he had spent a life-long search. It was the sudden realization of his fondest dream. He thought of the beautiful island of flowers and birds, the streets of Nassau and seaside drives, the coconut groves and gardens, the shell and coral-strewn beaches—then amid this flood of thought on the little paradise, which was home to him, although he had never admitted it to Katherine, he wondered if it would be safe for him to return there in company with one who trusted him and elsewhere on earth would have no opportunity of learning the awful secret of his life.

Why was it that when fate brought him so close to the borderland of happiness, he must stand quaking like an aspen-leaf in the wind, fearing that the next gust would plunge him into deeper misery than he had ever before known; for would not the truth concerning him if known by Katherine cause her to shun him like a poisonous reptile? And if he went to Nas-

sau with her, he dared not trust to fortune that she would not learn the truth.

"No, I shall not, I cannot go to Nassau. Why, do not ask me; I cannot explain. I have enemies there; I do not care to meet them; it would turn my paradise into torment. But must my dream of happiness be shattered because I may not go to a certain island city on the broad face of this broad earth? Why not to another city—why to Nassau?"

"Mr. Graham says I am going to Nassau," replied Katherine calmly, yet failing in her attempt to conceal the disappointment which she felt at what seemed to be a sudden change of determination on the part of Henriques, who had theretofore pleaded his own cause with graceful rhetoric and had never before hesitated, until she spoke of Nassau, which to her seemed the solution of the puzzle that had mentally weighed upon them both, for each had suspected that evil-doers were at work.

"But here we are talking," said Katherine suddenly, "and doubtless the others are waiting for us at the boat. Ah Jean—I never before called you Jean—If we could but have this day together and if we could but fling our suspicions and doubts to that soft breeze floating out on Biscayne Bay!"

"Then you doubt me?" he forced himself to ask.

"No," came from her lips, "but I doubt others!"

Then she walked away toward the hotel entrance and disappeared, leaving Henriques to his

thoughts. He stood still and gazed blankly out over the sea towards Nassau.

"Accursed city of my ancestors," he mused. "Is it not enough that I am branded among men when within my native walls—must I carry the taint and my own scorn for myself wherever I go? Oh Nassau! One, twice, thrice I left you as I thought forever. Now I live a life of strange torment away from you, or return to your finger of disdain and hatred! I return to you or cast from my grasp the rarest jewel of earth. Oh Nassau, have you no heart? Have you no pity? Like some miserable sorceress, your neck is twined about with coral and sea-mosses. You are beautiful to look upon. A stranger within your gates, I could woo her and wed her and thus in happiness approach my coming death. But now—accursed city—you offer me nothing. You gave me nothing but the brand of a miserable birth. Better had I never been born. Better had you never known your miserable son, Jean Henriques!"

Miserable man! Sad in his own dream of happiness, he wandered listlessly up and down the veranda, puffing nervously at a cigarette and forgetting all about the excursion on the river.

The others waited a few moments in vain, and when he did not come, Katherine delighted her envious companion by a gurgle of laughter and the suggestion that the party was "all aboard." The yacht started up the river and not until it had turned the curve from sight of the hotel did Henriques remember. Then with a sudden start

he hastened to the pier. Inquiries proved that the party had gone. He calmly lit another cigarette and throwing himself on the grass, looked with a curse on his lips toward Nassau in the Bahama islands.



A SNAKE IN THE GRASS

Chapter VI

CHAPTER VI.

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

The sun was rising over the Florida east coast. The eastern sky was fast losing its roseate curtain, and soft lemon shades were rising from the water's crest, as if to screen off the orb that hesitated beyond the horizon. Purple beams radiated from a flaming center and variegated mists from the ocean arose like incense to the nostrils of some perfume-loving god. A lone gull darted hither and thither over the waves, occasionally plunging through the foam that mounted the sapphire and azure crests. A sailing ship from the Keys was crossing the fiery path that seemed to lead from the fountain of light over the deep water to the palm-strewn shore. A soft and aromatic breeze from the south was swaying the moss that hung from dead boughs. The waves were sadly lapping the white sand of the shore. In the distance a clam-digger with trousers rolled up was wading knee-deep into the water and hooking up the little bivalves for the hotel cuisine. A lad from a plantaion was driving his mule back home, along the road that parallels the beach, after leaving vegetables and fruit at the village stores. Down at the pier two or three boatmen were preparing for the day's cruise.

But there was an oppressive silence over it all. Distances appeared to be further than they really were. The forest of wild orange and lime two miles to the west looked like a wall of mauve shutting out the sandy slope from the rest of the world. The dews of a Florida night were still over everything. The beach vetches and scrubby plants of the water-edge were weighed with crystal drops that sparkled like opals when struck by the eastern light. It was the same color that beams over Venice at the hour of dawning, but there it reflects the long shadows from man's handiwork; in Florida the virgin soil is much as in the primeval day. The sun that rises over Florida has been painting the landscape in florid hues for a thousand years and the hand of man has not greatly interfered. Each dawning is but another shifting of the kaleidoscope of time, always exhibiting the brilliancy of nature's palette. It is an epoch in the life of any man who beholds it, a picture never to be forgotten.

The train from the north was arriving at the station at Miami just as the crest of the sun peaked over the horizon and the cries of a dozen hackmen were soon piercing the air, bidding for patronage from the crowd of passengers who alighted on the platform and although pleasure bent, seemed much fatigued from travel and lazily strolled along towards the station to enter the carriages for the various cottages and converted homes styled "hotels" in the winter season.

"Hello, son," said a white-haired old man, who stepped forward to clasp the hand of an athletic

chap who alighted from a Pullman and anxiously surveyed the waiting group to recognize a familiar face.

"Rather early, governor," he replied, as he took the hand of his parent and endeavored by a glance to read his thoughts and the cause for his peculiar and sudden summons to Florida.

"What on earth did you send for me for?" he asked as soon as the two had gone through the perfunctory greeting and had started along the platform arm in arm. The old man hesitated a moment and then forcing a smile, he replied: "Didn't mind coming down, did you? Didn't mind exchanging Cleveland weather for this eh?"

"Not exactly—no, but why did you send for me?" pressed the youth eagerly, but his father made no reply, directing him towards a carriage and telling the driver which way to take them.

"We'll go over here, son—over here by the beach and let him take your luggage to the hotel, then we can walk along when we are ready. It will surprise you when I tell you that your mother doesn't know you're coming, and I don't want her to know until I tell you why I sent for you. Then we'll surprise both of them."

"How is Katherine—all right?"

The old man dropped his eyes and suddenly changed his expression.

"All right, I guess. She's having a good time, she says."

"For the life of me I can't see what this all means, and you give me little satisfaction."

George Graham looked serious, for he thought he recognized the same expression on his father's

face. The old man kept steadfastly to silence, however, until the carriage reached the drive along Biscayne Bay, when he signalled the coachman to stop, stepped from the carriage with his son and led the way to a rustic bench beneath a few scrub palmettoes that grew up from the beach sands.

"Now to come straight to the point, son," began the old man, as they sat down.

"That's just it; you can't come to the point too quickly," interrupted the youth, impatiently. "I never had such a forty-eight hours in my life. Here you seem to be well, you say mother and Katherine are well, and I can't make out what it's all about. Not financial affairs, father?" He looked up into his father's face nervously, expecting to hear of some disaster which had been carefully hidden from his mother and Katherine.

"Finances? Bah!" The old man slapped his hand upon his knee. "I wish it were financial trouble. Yes, you look as if you doubt me, but I mean it. I'd rather it were money—yes, any amount of it than this."

"Yes, father——"

"You make me nervous, son, and I don't know how to begin. I thought I'd have the nerve to tell you and I couldn't wait for you to come, but now I hate it. Still it may be all a mistake—all some idle treachery or even blackmail."

"Blackmail?" gasped the youth, clutching his father's hand. "Who would dare to blackmail you? Who could say one word about you? Everyone knows your record. Everyone——"

The old man held up his hand and shook his

head regretfully. "Not me—not me. I would not care for that, for I would know it was a lie."

"Not me, father?" broke in the youth.

"No, no; not you, son—not you."

"Who on earth then—who?"

The old man bowed his head and made no answer.

"You mean——" They read each other's thoughts and the old man bowed his head.

"My God! Is it Katherine?"

"It is, son; it is Katherine."

"Out with it, then; don't think I am afraid to face it. I'd drive the devil off the earth, but I'd thrash him for saying anything about her."

The youth straightened up and began pacing to and fro.

"That will do no good, son. You must keep your temper and use your wits. It isn't anything that's been said in the open. It came in the form of a miserable anonymous letter—came through the mails addressed to me."

"What did the letter say?" pressed the youth quickly, calming himself.

"Are you sure that you want to hear it?"

"Why shouldn't I hear it and see it?"

"For reasons which I may know better than you surmise. But I am willing to tell you; in fact, that's why I sent for you, just to tell you and see what you think. It was like this: the letter came on a scrap of cheap note-paper and was plainly written in a disguised hand, misspelled and folded in a slovenly manner; in fact, a letter that you would expect to receive from some ignorant nigger who meant to frighten you

by dastardly threats; or, on the other hand, the thing may have come from some creature who knew no better and wrote it as best he could——”

“Or *she* could, you mean,” suggested the youth suspiciously. “When the character of a woman is attacked it’s usually a pretty good thing to suspect that another woman had a hand in it. Women are the angelic ministers of charity—to men, but they are devils among women; they are envious, perhaps, of the charms possessed by one and not by all.”

“This was no woman’s trick,” declared the elder. “A woman would have made a more bungling job of it. It’s plain that we have no woman in this case. It’s the rotten business of some villain who knows you, me, mother or Katherine, and wishes to make us all unhappy.”

“What does the letter say?” asked George, weary of avoiding the subject further.

“Little, very little, son, but it implies much; it makes grave insinuations; it would be better if it were plainer. The letter said in substance: ‘Beware of Katherine Belmont. Prevent the marriage of that girl to your son, or you will spend your life in disgrace and curse the day that your son was born. Take this advice and separate them. If you do, you would give your fortune for this information now. If you don’t, you’ll remember when it’s too late. Better find out who the parents of Katherine Belmont really were, but you won’t find out from me, and you’ll never know who I am, so you may as well not try. This letter will be mailed from Jacksonville, but it is not being written there.’ The thing was

signed 'X.' and, as it said, the postmark was from Jacksonville. It isn't possible to tell whether it was written there or anywhere else. In fact, son, I can't tell a thing about it."

The old man now spoke calmly and seemed relieved after having delivered his message, but his son paced nervously back and forth, snapping his fingers and frowning as he heard the recitation of the story.

"Well, what shall we do about it?" he said at length. "What is there to do? Tell the postal authorities? Could they help us, and would they?"

"My resources are exhausted and yet I have done nothing," replied the elder. "I considered it the best thing to guard the secret and I have done this jealously—not one soul knows about it; not a person shall, if I have my way. It might mean disgrace; at any rate, it would be a scandal and make all kinds of gossip if the newspapers got hold of it. It would make Katherine unhappy, even miserable, and your mother, I tell you, son, she would never have another happy hour."

"Then you haven't mentioned this to mother?" pressed the son.

"Not one word. She has asked me what ailed me and so I know I've shown it, although I tried not to. It broke me up and I couldn't wholly conceal it. I've told them that I wasn't well. Then they advised sending for a doctor. I protested and tried to make them believe that business was bad. But the stock report made that a lie. So it ran along and I couldn't do anything

but send for you, just as I have, and tell you the story."

"As to the story, I don't think much of it myself," said the son slowly and thoughtfully. "It's plainly a trick and a dirty, contemptible trick at that. I believe the best thing to do is to let it all pass without a word or action from us. Everybody gets letters from these scamps who try to make trouble; that is, everybody who is anybody and anything. We wouldn't receive such a letter as this if we belonged to the herd of cattle who are contemptible enough to write such letters and do such things. If you keep your feet in the ditch, you can go your way, but if you raise yourself above the level of the gutter there's somebody trying to drag you back."

"That's good; it sounds very well," replied the father, "but you won't feel that way after you have thought the matter over. It will make your blood boil with suspicion and rage. I expected you would go to pieces when I told you."

"On the contrary, I am much relieved," replied the son. "I was frightened at first that it might be something serious."

"Something serious!" stormed the old man imperatively. "I tell you it is serious."

"I don't see it that way."

"You will."

"No, father, I tell you I am relieved. Katherine should never know of this and mother shall never know. Then everything will move along as we expected."

"George"—the tone of Graham's voice indicated that he had never been more serious in his

life—"the consequences of this thing may be more than you think. It would be insane to go ahead now and plunge into what might become a scandal for the clubs and everyone we know. You must think."

"Think about what?"

"Don't irritate me, son; don't make me sorry for what I might say. I tell you this is a strange business. I——"

"You don't believe it, do you?" interrupted the son. "You don't for one minute put any stock in this thing of which you know nothing, absolutely nothing?"

"Believe what? I grant you there's nothing to believe or disbelieve. It isn't that. I am suspicious."

"Sorry," retorted the son, with a sarcastic curl of the lip and a shrug of the shoulders.

"You beat the devil!" growled the old man. "You don't seem to think and you don't seem to care. I tell you I will not tolerate this thing. You must make different arrangements."

"In regard to our marriage, do you mean?"

"Yes, you should wait and see what this all means. We may learn in time, and then there will be time to decide what to do."

"Do? What is there to do? I am determined."

"You are determined now, but you may change your mind."

"Shall we move along, father?" broke in the youth nervously. "I've heard enough about this; I don't want to discuss it further. It's the first time in my life that I ever disobeyed you, but

I'm like a rock in this and you can't stir me. Someone is playing us a vile, dirty trick and I'll not give the writer of that letter the satisfaction of consideration. Come, let us go to the hotel and surprise mother."

George Graham grasped his father by the arm and urged him to rise, but the old man was immovable. He stared at the ground and bit his lips with vexation and determination.

"Won't you come?" urged the son.

"Your mother isn't at the hotel, George," replied the elder Graham with marked emphasis, looking up with evident satisfaction that he had at least been able to say something to move the son to curiosity if not to fear, in which he had failed thus far.

"Not at the hotel? Then where is she?"

"She went to Nassau on yesterday's steamer."

"To Nassau?"

"Yes."

"And Katherine?" asked George almost breathlessly.

"She went, too. That's why I sent for you, thinking that we could make our plans before they return."

"When are they coming back?" demanded the youth.

"Don't know yet. Perhaps, well—perhaps not at all. I may join them there—and—well—we may stay there till we go back home, taking the New York steamer that stops on the way up from Cuba."

George Graham hung his head at last and weakened. His father noticed it and continued:

"Better to move, I thought, after this thing happened; and I encouraged your mother and her to go and promised them that I would follow after a few days' fishing here in the bay. I may go on the next steamer, which leaves to-morrow. I haven't fully made up my mind."

The youth sauntered away towards the white-pebbled walk that borders the sea-drive.

"Are you coming?" he asked, not turning his head to observe.

"I'll win yet," thought the elder Graham. "He's head-strong, but why shouldn't he be? He gets that honestly enough, because he's a Graham, but in this case age and experience will count for something, and I'll win him yet."

Then as he strolled along slowly another suspicion suddenly flashed through his mind. He wondered if it were possible for a letter written in Cleveland to be mailed at Jacksonville. This prompted the eternal question in his mind, "Who are my friends and who are my enemies?"

BREAKERS AHEAD

Chapter VII

CHAPTER VII.

BREAKERS AHEAD.

"You must meet a Mr. de Goncourt," said the elder Graham, as the two men entered the hotel dining-room for luncheon. "He sits at our table and was with Katherine a good deal before she and your mother went to Nassau."

"What's his name?" asked George with a puzzled look.

"De Goncourt. He's a jolly good chap. A very common sort of fellow, too; he isn't much like Frenchmen you read of in books—just a plain, every-day sort of fellow who seems to be over here for a good time."

"Yes, most of them are looking for that," sneered George, as his father bowed and exchanged greetings with the Frenchman, who was busy with a plate of soup.

"Such a surprise for me," began Graham, unceremoniously. "I've had such a surprise this morning. Let me introduce my son, George; he's just come down from the North by the morning train."

De Goncourt looked up coldly and took the hand that George extended towards him.

"Glad to see you!" escaped his lips.

"This gentleman was very gracious to Katherine," added Graham, as they took their seats.

"This is the lucky man, de Goncourt," with a familiar smile to the Frenchman and a gesture towards George. "You doubtless heard Katherine speak of George?"

"Never," replied de Goncourt, as he shoved aside the soup plate. "I never happened to speak with Miss Belmont about her friends."

"Miss Belmont does me the honor to be my fiancée," said George, with a tone half indignant and half-boasting.

"Is it possible," smirked de Goncourt, feigning surprise. "Really, I never surmised that Miss Belmont had matrimonial intentions."

George would have retorted, but in full view of de Goncourt his father motioned him to remain quiet, and a waiter holding out a bill of fare gave him an excuse to pay the remark no attention.

It was apparent to Graham that the two men had a strong aversion towards one another, dating from their first glance.

"No appetite to-day, Mr. Graham," said de Goncourt, as he abruptly threw his napkin on the table and shoved back his chair. "Too warm for an appetite here. I think I'll be off to St. Augustine shortly."

Without a nod or glance at George, the Frenchman left the table and sauntered across the floor. George watched him in speechless amazement until he had reached the door, then turning to his father, he said:

"Who is he, anyway?"

"He was introduced to us by Madame Du Laurence," replied Graham.

"Who?"

"Madame Du Laurence, an old lady who acted as a chaperon for Katherine."

"Who is she?"

"Well, upon my word, son, I haven't got the woman's pedigree. She stopped at the Ponce while we were there. A most inoffensive mortal, although rather talky."

"Probably rather offensive, but none of you could see it."

"You suspect everyone."

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Why should you? I thought if you met this chap, de Goncourt, he might get your mind off this miserable business and you'd forget it at least long enough to get a bite to eat."

"He's a dirty cad," interrupted George. "You say he was 'gracious' to Katherine. Such men are usually 'gracious.' I could read him like a book; he's a snake, a dirty loafer."

"Well, now, that's nice of you, son; he has been with us almost constantly since we came to Florida. If you had seen him before you'd have a different opinion of him. He always appeared to be a gentleman."

George made no reply, and as the soup was served they sipped it without a word passing between them. As the dishes were cleared for another course, the two glanced at one another.

"Want anything more?" asked the father.

"Not a thing," replied George. "Let's go out, and if there are any more of these associates of yours around the hotel point them out to me. I'd like to see just who Katherine has been with

in Florida; and then I think we won't have such a hard time tracing the writer of that letter."

The two left the table and sauntered out on the veranda. As they passed a bank of palms de Goncourt met them face to face, and with a sudden change of countenance addressed them pleasantly:

"Well, now, you through luncheon so soon, too? I tell you, gentlemen, this is no place for an appetite."

"Depends upon what one craves," retorted George curtly.

"Oh, I say, old chap, you haven't been down here long enough, though, have you? You should have brought your good appetite from the North with you. Are you engaged for an hour? What do you say to a sail on the bay?"

De Goncourt took George by the arm familiarly and made a gesture towards the blue Biscayne waves.

"Thanks, I don't care to sail," replied George, lighting a cigar.

"Better go a short while, eh?" suggested the elder Graham.

"Go if you choose; I'll wait for you here."

"Now, I say, old chap, come on," urged de Goncourt. "Come along and I'll explain to you then. Don't harbor any ill-feelings about that affair in there at luncheon. I know it was rude—yes, damned rude, but all to a good purpose for both of us. Come now, Miss Belmont and I are good friends and you and I should be. Will you come?"

George hesitated a moment, but at a forward

step from his father he caught the cue, smiled and consented.

The three went to the wharf, hoisted the sails on a trim little yacht, and were soon bounding over the blue towards the east entrance to the open sea.

"Looks rough outside," said George, as he peered ahead into the distance.

"Rough?" laughed de Goncourt. "Why, this little craft will run those waves as easily as the river shallows. Don't mind the waves."

"Mind them? I like them. Biscayne Bay and Lake Erie are made of the same sort of stuff, you know. Waves don't frighten me."

"That's so, old chap. Another reason why we should be good friends. If I've one passion, it is for the water; I should have been a sailor—yes, sir, a sailor's life for me."

"Straight out, then, is it?" asked George, in a reckless and half-taunting tone of voice.

"Straight out," answered de Goncourt. "I'll be glad of a little dipping in the good old salt water. Haven't been outside the bay but once since I came to Miami. It's a river-crazy crowd there at the hotel. They would rather shoot an alligator than catch a tarpon, and much prefer to tangle the wheel with river debris and roots than to push the nose of the launch into a wave that is a wave."

De Goncourt stopped short and suddenly turned the rudder, so that the wind caught the sail, and they took a straight course for the open sea.

"The island for me," shouted the elder Gra-

ham, as the launch took a deep plunge into the trough of a wave. "This is all right for those who like it, but smoother water or dry land for me."

"No danger, Mr. Graham; I assure you there's no danger. This launch would ride a sea four times as heavy as this. Why, the other day, I——"

De Goncourt stopped short and slackened sail suddenly. The launch dipped water and plunged about like a cork as the sail caught a fresher breeze. Graham the elder gave a cry of fright. "Take me ashore! I don't want any more of this. No, sir, not for me."

"Surely," replied de Goncourt. "On the island? We may drop you off there and then pick you up on our way back. What do you say, Mr. Graham?"

"Why, yes, father, if you don't mind; I'd like a little dip in the salt."

"Do as you please about that, but shore for me," replied Graham.

The boat was already flying along towards the island, for de Goncourt was glad of an excuse to rid himself of the old man, and he quickly conceived the possibility of having just the conversation that he desired with George Graham. He had suggested the sail merely as a means of forcing the pretended friendship, upon which he had resolved when he had reached the open air of the hotel, and realized how stupidly he had conducted himself at the table; when he recollected how anxious he had been to come face to face

with the man who expected to become the husband of Katherine Belmont.

Another thought suddenly flashed through his mind, however, and assuming to be busily engaged with the simple rigging of the ship, he was in reality weighing carefully the tactics that he should pursue as the most advantageous to his purpose. All were silent for several moments as the launch tossed and bounded about, much to the elder Graham's discomfort, although George seemed to forget for the moment what had depressed him since his arrival in Florida, and he seemed to be thoroughly enjoying it.

"You must have been much on the water," said George at length. "You know how to handle her."

De Goncourt made no reply and looked ahead, as if engaged in steering the yacht in a straight course for the landing on the island.

"Father, you're foolish to go ashore. This is winter, remember, when old Erie is frozen tight. You couldn't go yachting at home, you know. Thermometer was only ten degrees above when I left. You should be glad of a sail to compensate for the sleigh-rides."

Still de Goncourt was silent.

"You have been sleighing?" asked George.

"Never," replied de Goncourt sullenly.

"What, never rode on snow?" queried the old man, who was beginning to regain a little composure as they came closer to land.

"Never," repeated de Goncourt.

"You should come North, really you should," suggested George with a growing cordiality.

"Spent your winters in Paris?" queried Graham.

"No, in Louisiana."

"Oh, in New Orleans?" laughed George, with a wink at de Goncourt. The latter made no reply, but suddenly turned the nose of the yacht toward the North and slid along close to land.

"Mighty deep water here," he said, as the sail hung limp and the trim little craft fell alongside a table-like rock that projected out to the water's edge.

"It's all too deep out here for me," sighed Graham.

"Father, you're no sailor," smirked George.

"Say we all go ashore for a few minutes?" suggested de Goncourt.

"Sure," assented George. "They say there are some fine corals and shells around Miami. We might find some here."

He sprang ashore quickly, grasping the side of the boat and holding it fast as he extended the other hand to his father, who sprang to the firm footing with considerable pleasure.

"Guess I better turn her nose around the other way," suggested de Goncourt. "Just let go a minute and I'll sail around here and run her nose into that crevice in the rock. We can tie her there and she won't pound in the waves."

George Graham let go of the boat and it slipped beyond reach. The eyes of the Frenchman were suddenly turned back to the two men who stood upon the rock, and they instinctively felt a strange telepathic warning of what was to follow.

"My God, father!" exclaimed George under breath. "Look at him! What's he doing?"

"What do you mean?" queried the father, trembling with fear. They had not long to wait, however, for de Goncourt was soon at a safe distance and the current was bearing him along rapidly.

"Damn you both!" his voice rang out, and he gestured violently towards the two on the rock. "Now I've got you where you belong and where you'll stay till you can swim back to land. You know where you are, do you? A swampy island where no one lives. You are five miles from Miami and on the sea side. It would mean death to you to cross the swamps to the other side. The coast is rocky and broken at both ends of the island. So stay there! There on that rock, and think of me. Remember Alphonse de Goncourt. Ha!"

The man laughed like a demon and roared each word that he spoke.

"He's insane!" suggested Graham with a shudder. "George, George, what shall we do?"

The son stood riveted to the rock like a statue. Now that he saw how he had been duped, and being quick at discerning the evil intentions of the man in the launch, he dared not say what he thought.

"Fools!" roared de Goncourt. "You are safe now, so I will tell you. I told you I was from Paris. You were so silly that I lied. New Orleans it is—Ha! Yes, and so is the girl you call Katherine Belmont."

George Graham was paralyzed. The thought

of his own safety left him at the mention of Katherine's name. A thousand fears and fancies flashed through his mind after he heard it spoken. It seemed to him as if he had heard it thundered by some demon passing on a cloud drifting at sea. It seemed that a flash of hellish lightning had printed it upon his brain.

"Come back, you damnable coward," he shouted at de Goncourt. "Come back and meet me on equal grounds. I don't ask you to rescue us. We have been duped, and perhaps deserve to be left here because we trusted you. But come back, you human devil, and let me put these fingers to your throat and you'll never speak her name again."

De Goncourt laughed fiendishly. "You would, eh?" He pulled a revolver from his pocket and flourished it wildly.

"Hold your dirty tongue, or I'll make a target of you." Then, after a moment's hesitation, he dropped the hand in which he held the weapon and yelled wildly: "No, I won't shoot you there, that would be too good. You deserve to die, but a slow death for you!" Starve, damn you, starve, and then remember me!"

"Accursed remnant of a race of frog-eaters!" roared the elder Graham.

"No, no," laughed de Goncourt mockingly. "You are wrong there, old man. Just as stupid there as in other things. I am no more French than you are. No, I am a negro!"

"Your heart's as black as the arch-devil of hell's," shouted George.

"But a keener wit than the white man?"

sneered the man in the boat. "More!" he roared. "Can you hear me yet? Listen! You received a warning some days ago. You were told that Katherine Belmont, or the girl you call that, could not be your wife."

"You wrote that letter?" interrupted George, as his father clung nervously to his arm.

"Yes. I wrote it because I gave you credit for having as much sense as other white men have, and that would have been enough. But you— Bah! You haven't the brains of an ass, or you would have guessed. I am a negro, yes, and Katherine is a negress."

"You lie!" shouted George.

"A negress," roared back de Goncourt.

A stiff wind struck the sail as he gave it the full breeze; the little craft shot beyond hearing like a flash. De Goncourt stood in the stern and waved frantically at the two men on the rock.

The elder Graham burst into tears and fell on his knees. His son stood erect and watched the yacht turn the point of land and disappear in the waters of Biscayne Bay. For a moment his mind was a blank as he gazed out to the sky and water of the east, the rock-strewn beach of the north and south, and the solid background of tropical forest to the westward.

"It's all my fault, George, all my fault; but what shall we do?" whimpered the old man.

"Come on," said George firmly. "It may not be as he said. There may be people on the island. We can hail a yacht if we can get to the other side of the island. Come, we don't

want to spend the night on this God-forsaken hump of land. Come on!"

He assisted the old man to rise, and together they started towards the west. But in their excitement they had not looked about them. Suddenly they saw that they were not even on an island. They were perched on a rock separated from the land by a deep channel through which the tide was now streaming rapidly. At sight of this the old man's legs grew limp beneath him and he sank down in dismay.

"My God!" he wailed. "We are lost!"

"No, I'm not so sure of that," replied the son.

"What can we do?"

"I'll swim over to the island and see if I can get a signal to the mainland," said George, with a sudden determination to cheer his father, who was frightened beyond expression and had sunk down upon the lonely rock.

"I'll build a fire in that underbrush. It looks dry enough to burn, and I don't care if the breeze spreads it over the island."

He made no mention of de Goncourt and what he had done; what had been his aim and what might be the result. All his energies were bent on affording as quick relief as possible. All he wanted was to reach the shore in safety with his father and then start on the pursuit of the man who had plainly enough desired his death, but who had been too cowardly to murder him. Graham, however, was mentally reproving himself for his failure to see in the Frenchman what his son had apparently caught at a glance.

"Remember what he said about the swamp and the coast, George," continued his father.

"Damn what he said!" shouted George, throwing off his coat and vest. "Damnation would be too good for him. He lied to us about everything else. He would lie about this. He did it to frighten us." George was fast stripping to the skin.

"Are you going to leave me here on this rock alone?" moaned Graham. "What in Heaven's name shall I do while you are away? I shall go mad."

The old man suddenly arose and, throwing his arms above his head, paced back and forth as far as the rocky ledge.

"I shall go mad!" he repeated.

"You certainly will, father, unless you cool down and mix a little common sense with your fright."

George spoke calmly, and his attitude had a reassuring effect upon the older Graham, who again shook from head to foot and fell crouching at the feet of his son.

"I'll try, George, I'll try; but you must remember that I am not as young as you are, and—oh, this is terrible—terrible! I cannot swim."

"You won't have to swim," replied George. "Just sit on this rock and let me swim across. I'll take a look at things and I can call back to you. You can certainly hear me from the shore there."

"But look at the tide rushing in among these rocks. You could not swim in that. It would

draw you under, and then—oh, God, then what would I do!"

"After I've gone to the bottom there will be time enough to talk about that. Now I'm going. You hear what I say and I mean it. I shall reach the other shore and find some means of rescue for both of us."

George made a move towards the side of the rock; but his father clutched at his legs and hindered him.

"My God!" he cried. "George, it has just dawned on me. You can't swim in this water. There are sharks here."

"Sharks!" roared George, assuming to make light of this remark. "Yes, I suppose there are, and whales, too."

"You don't know, you see," pleaded the old man. "This is no silly fear of mine. There are sharks here that snap the fish from lines being drawn into the boats. They have been known to bite off men's legs and arms, and if you went in there they'd kill you. No, no; do not go. Wait here and some boat will be passing."

"No boats out here to-day in this sea," replied George. "They'd have sense enough to stay in the bay."

"I told you not to venture out into the open," moaned the old man.

"I'm going," cried George, defiantly, and measuring his steps, he ran across the rock and dived into the deep blue water that was surging along at a rapid flow. The old man was paralyzed with fear. He saw George's head rise and fall with the tide. He feared that each white-

crested wave might close over his son forever, taking away from him that which he loved most in life and leaving him to a horrible death by starvation. But George was a good swimmer and rode the waves well, although he had never been in the sea and knew nothing of the tide and current against which he was obliged to baffle. The horror of his own position was forgotten by Graham as he gazed towards his son. The suspense was little more than momentary, however, for George soon reached a point where he stood only waist deep, with the water splashing about him, and turned to relieve his father's anxiety by shouting, "No sharks, father!"

The old man breathed more easily, but watched his son as he strolled up and down the beach surveying the territory and seemingly casting his plans for breaking through the swamps for the west shore.

Then, as he calmed himself, he remembered what de Goncourt had said about Katherine Belmont.

"A negress," he mused with a shudder. "Impossible! Only malicious slander! The filthy vomitings of his vile mouth."

Then he asked himself how long he had known her. Six, yes, seven years ago, she had come to Cleveland to spend a fortnight at the home of a Vassar chum. They graduated in the same class and had been always together at college. The usual social routine awaited them. Their pictures were printed in the newspapers as they appeared on the golf links. Another photographer caught them as they alighted at the Lade residence for

the annual garden party. There were luncheons at the Union and Colonial clubs, dinners at the Country club, theatre parties, suppers and a veritable whirlwind of engagements, at all of which Katherine Belmont shone with brilliancy. Her beauty, grace, wit and tact endeared her to all of the select circles into which she was introduced. Her debut or introduction was the sensation of the summer season, and, importuned by new acquaintances, she prolonged her visit from week to week, finally joining a family who resided on Carnegie Avenue for their annual cruise to Georgian Bay. This fortnight's cruise was one of the turning points in her career, for before the pretty launch returned to Cleveland Katherine had decided to make the Forest City her home—at least temporarily. She had no father nor mother—so ran the gossip of the day. She had belonged to a prominent Southern family that became reduced during the war. An uncle in New Orleans had provided the means for her education, and from him she received a liberal allowance. He was a bachelor and business kept him constantly on the move. Life at Vassar had unfitted her for life in a New Orleans mansion as the mistress of her uncle's household, of which he was seldom a member. While many of these minor incidents did not originate in Katherine's brain, she dropped a word now and then that gave them credit. The maiden aunt of the young woman, whose father owned the yacht upon which the eventful cruise was made to the beautiful islands of the North, developed a strange and unaccountable fondness

for Katherine, and as the days passed became so thoroughly devoted to her and so mindful of the young woman's position in the world, that she opened her heart and home to her, prevailed upon her to seek the permission of her uncle to remain in the North under the highly respectable chaperonage of the woman who maintained a splendid establishment in town and could do so much to further her social aspirations and contribute so greatly to her happiness. The permission arrived in due season, with the understanding attached that Katherine should return to her uncle and benefactor not later than the following spring. This was agreeable to all, and before the winter season opened, the beautiful brunette was firmly established in social esteem and the bonds of affection grew tighter and tighter between her and the elderly woman who had taken her into her home, with all the devotion and love that she might have felt for her sister's child.

Months passed, and when spring came there was no thought of Katherine returning to her own. Years passed the same way, and the world in which Katherine Belmont lived seemed to forget that she had lived elsewhere than Cleveland. When it was announced that she had become engaged to George Graham there was not even a flutter in society. It was considered the most natural thing in the world. Mrs. Graham, George's mother, had long since admired Katherine and respected her refinement. "Old Southern aristocracy" had a fascinating ring in her ears when the momentary doubt of the young

woman's origin presented itself to her. She saw in Katherine the model wife for her handsome son. She could see them as husband and wife. What a handsome couple they would make! They would fill and perhaps eclipse the Graham family social prestige, that had been noteworthy for many years along Euclid Avenue.

"New Orleans!" the old man repeated to himself; but while endeavoring to blot the thought from his mind, the face of Madame Du Laurence arose before his vision. Why, he could not tell; but her face haunted him and he began to fear that he might have been deceived by her just as he had been deceived by de Goncourt. His memory wandered back to their arrival at St. Augustine; how the strange woman had forced herself upon Katherine and how she had succeeded in gaining not only the respect but the friendship of the three of them, all confiding in her and believing that she was a most estimable woman. Then he also remembered that he had seen de Goncourt much in the company of Madame Du Laurence, and he fancied that she might have had a part in the plot that cast him on a rock surrounded by threatening water.

George's voice interrupted his musings, however, and he started suddenly at a cry of "Look! Look!" Following the direction to which his son pointed, Graham saw a steam launch turning the narrow strip of land and rock at the end of the island. A ray of hope suddenly flashed through his mind and he felt the assurance that delivery from his perilous position was now a certainty. With the usual selfishness he thought first of

his own safety and thought nothing of the sorrows that might await him when he reached land and attempted to fathom the mysteries of the plot woven about him. George shouted frantically to the men in the launch. His father also cried out, and they were soon rewarded by a signal from the craft which proved that they had been discovered and were safe from at least the imminent danger that threatened them.

Nearer and nearer came the little craft, braving the waves that caused it to toss about, and soon it came up alongside the rock on which the elder Graham was standing, while George eagerly watched each move from the beach, distrustful of its rescuers, and fearing they might also be curious participants in the whole weird drama.

"Narrow clip, neighbor!" shouted one of the men on the boat as he threw out a grappling hook and brought the boat up against the rock. "Why, I swear you're not even wet!" He looked in astonishment at Graham, who was nervously dividing his glances between George on the shore and the man who addressed him.

"Pretty good scare, eh?" continued the persistent rescuer, as he offered his hand to Graham. "A little lonesome on this rock, eh? Damned glad we ran outside the bay; but these cowards didn't want to do so." He pointed to his companions in the boat with a sneering laugh.

"But we didn't know!" protested one of them.

"If we had we should have—"

"Probably left me to come out alone," laughed the stranger. "Oh, I tell you neighbor, they're

all afraid down here when there's a little sea on."

He endeavored in this fashion to cause Graham to talk; but the old man was speechless and began to sob audibly.

"Come, come, your nerves are unstrung," said the stranger, sympathetically. "Only two of you?"

Graham nodded and looked towards the shore just in time to see his son take a plunge into the waves bound for the rock upon which he had left his clothes.

"My God! George! George!" Graham cried out and began to pace the rock, always keeping his eyes riveted on the body in the water.

"Your son?" the stranger inquired solicitously.

"Yes."

"You were alone in the boat?"

"Alone? No."

"What do you mean, man? Was there any one else in the yacht with you?" The man suddenly became excited and grasped Graham's arm, demanding an answer.

"Wait," said Graham, pulling away from him and keeping his eye riveted on George. "Wait and he'll tell you."

Thinking the old man had lost his senses, the party of rescuers commented upon his strange actions, and were perhaps correct in their supposition, for Graham seemed to become deaf, blind and speechless. As George reached the side of the rock, Graham sprang forward and would have fallen into the water had not the men caught hold of him to prevent it. George jumped to the rock and, misinterpreting the motive of

the men in surrounding his father and holding him back, while he could hear the old man calling his name, ran to his clothes, which lay in a heap, and taking a revolver from his pocket, pointed it in the direction of their heads.

"Let him go!" he shouted, and like a flash their arms dropped, allowing Graham to go to his son's side.

"Stand behind me, father," he shouted. "Now what is it that you want of us? Go on, speak quick, or I'll make quick time with you. We've had enough of this affair already."

"Are you crazy? What's the matter? We came out here to rescue you. Weren't you on that yacht that just went down?"

"Went down?" gasped George, as his father clutched his arm.

"Why, yes, we saw her founder and came here as quick as we could to see if we might be of assistance."

"You say the yacht went down?" repeated George.

"Yes," answered the stranger, thinking to humor an excited man. "Now cool down and tell us all about it. Were there only two of you aboard?"

"Don't you know?"

"No, we were too far off, we couldn't see."

"My God! Can we trust you, or are you in league with that treacherous devil who left us here?"

The strangers nodded back and forth one to another, with the belief that the two shipwrecked men had lost their senses.

"In league with who?" demanded the former speaker.

"Why, the devil who left us here."

"Left you here?"

"Yes, damn you; I half suspect that you all know about it!" George grew savage as he talked, but the stranger remained calm and betrayed no ill-feeling for the accusations that were hurled at him.

"Well, neighbors, let's not quarrel here. Put on your clothes, old chap, and we'll try our luck at rounding the point and pulling up alongside the wharf at Miami. You're stopping in Miami, I suspect?"

"We'll stop right here until you tell me who you are, why you are here and what you propose to do," answered George defiantly.

"With pleasure," replied the stranger, stepping forward and pulling a leather card case from his pocket. "At your service, Alfred H. Morgan, New York." George took the card and read the words.

"Come, come," urged Morgan, "pull on your things and we'll get off. More sea every minute, and you know I've got to get you fellows back to the mainland. I can see that this island business doesn't agree with you." He forced a smile and continued: "A narrow escape, though, old man; it was by the merest chance that we happened to see her when she went over. What was it, a sudden puff?"

"For God's sake, tell me again, man, did a sailing yacht from this side of the island go down?"

"It most certainly did. We saw it, and that's what brought us here."

"Was that devil drowned?"

"What devil?"

"His name was de Goncourt."

"De Goncourt!"

"He's dead, I hope."

"If he was on that yacht, he doubtless is; but tell me, how did you manage to get here? The yacht sank a half-mile from here, and you—" pointing to Graham, "your clothes are not wet."

"We can't tell you now." George began to pull on his clothes and his father breathed more easily, but still did not have the power of speech. Morgan decided not to press the conversation further, and went over to the shelter side of the rock where the boat lay, giving some little instructions to the men who accompanied him.

"Ready?" he asked, as he saw George pull on his shoes.

The old man merely clung to his son's arm and stepped down into the boat and sat where he was directed.

"We'll have a jolly rocking," said Morgan, as a puff of wind threw the boat over so she dipped water. No words escaped them during the few minutes of danger that followed. Finally, however, the trim little craft poked her nose inside the bay, after turning the island, and there was a comparative calm in the shelter of the narrow neck of land. As the yacht turned up the river towards the hotel pier an anxious crowd came to view.

"The report of the sinking of the yacht has reached the hotel," said Morgan. "Now, you haven't volunteered any information as to who you are or what connection you had with this affair. Nevertheless I'll leave it all to you. Remember, we merely saw you and picked you up from the island. The rest must be told by you. There will be plenty of excitement till they hear the story."

"George Graham is my name. Registered at the hotel. This gentleman is my father. You have probably saved our lives; at least you have taken us out of a miserable hell-trap. At the hotel, are you?"

Morgan nodded.

"I shall call upon you shortly."

The crowd gazed anxiously at the men in the yacht as they landed, but, taking his father by the arm, George made an easy escape to the hotel.

"Did she sink?" shouted someone to Morgan and his companions.

"Yes," he replied.

"Anybody drowned?" shouted another.

"I don't know."

"Those two on her?"

"Ask them," he retorted sharply, and the crowd craned its neck to see if the two had disappeared.

When the boat was tied up the crowd scattered and Morgan went up the hill. To a close friend who met him on the promenade and shouted "Bravo! A Carnegie medal for you," he urged silence and remarked in an undertone: "It's

the strangest thing in the world. Come along with me and hear it for yourself. I don't know any more about it than you do. I believe those men are either drunk or crazy."

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

Chapter VIII

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS.

"Look, Mrs. Graham! Isn't that really Mr. Henriques? I mean there with the brown suit. Upon my word it looks like him, all but the cap; you know he usually wears a hat."

The words sounded hollow enough to her own ears, and Katherine Belmont wondered if she had not made a bungling business of pretending that she was surprised to see Henriques sauntering along the deck of the little steamer that plies between Florida and the Bahama Islands. She and Mrs. Graham were seated in steamer chairs on the promenade, and the staunch little craft had been out about two hours on its trip from Miami. According to plans which were a secret to Katherine and the man to whom she had just called attention, he was to remain out of sight for several hours, then suddenly making an appearance, with the intention of deceiving Mrs. Graham into believing that their short voyage as fellow passengers was merely accidental. But the minutes seemed hours to him. He had remained below deck, while the steamer was twisting and turning in and out of the strange channel marked out with buoys and lights; but as the open sea gave the boat a sudden plunge and he

knew that Katherine was waiting for him, he climbed up on deck and made believe that he was looking at the distant islands through a pair of tourist's glasses, not daring to look at the passengers on deck, but feeling certain that two women of his acquaintance were among them.

"Isn't it the strangest thing in the world the way we meet these people in Florida?" ventured the old lady, anxiously leaning forward and following the direction Katherine had indicated.

"First in St. Augustine, then in Miami, and now on the ocean; did you ever see anything like it, Mrs. Graham?"

Katherine spoke nervously, fearing at each word that she would betray her feelings; but the old lady seemed quite as elated to recognize someone on board as did Katherine, and, as usual, she did not suspect.

"We should find out if it is Mr. Henriques," she suggested.

"I am almost certain of it," declared Katherine.

"He seems determined to keep his back turned this way."

"Looking at the islands, I guess."

"Now, see there, one of the sailors is speaking to him."

"Seems pleased, doesn't he?"

"I tell you, my dear, the ocean makes comrades of all people. You like to see a face that you have seen before."

"Some way, I fancy I remember Mr. Henriques saying that he had been in Nassau."

"You do?"

"I can't say for certain, but I believe so."

"Well, it's probably so, my dear, and if he has been over here we must have him tell us all about it."

"When we are going to see for ourselves?" ventured Katherine.

"I mean he must tell us how to see it, what to see, and when. Oh, my dear, it is such a help to have a few pointers from a person who is acquainted."

"But I am not sure that he has been in Nassau."

"Well, we are not sure that it is Mr. Henriques. But there—see, he is turning around."

Katherine's heart fluttered as she saw that what Mrs. Graham said was true. He had evidently waited as long as he could and finally decided to look at her. Katherine knew it. She quickly caught his glance and returned the greeting he offered to her and Mrs. Graham with the prettiest and happiest smile the youth had ever seen. With a bound he was at their side, his hat in one hand and the other extended to them.

"Again we met by chance!" twittered the old lady in a tone that was reassuring to the pair who heard her.

"My dear Mrs. Graham, I am delighted," he replied. "And Miss Belmont, what a happy surprise!"

"Yes, Mr. Henriques, I was just saying to Katherine that a familiar face looks good on shipboard."

"Indeed it does, Mrs. Graham, indeed it does!"

"None of the other friends are aboard, are

they?" asked the old lady, with an interest that amused her auditors.

"I think not. I haven't seen them," replied Henriques.

"But you have only just found us; you do not know, perhaps." Mrs. Graham forced a laugh. "You did not see us until long after Miss Belmont observed you."

Katherine was startled by this unexpected reference to her watchfulness and merely hung her head, while Henriques added gaily:

"Oh, I always said that the ladies have sharper eyes, sharper wits and sharper tongues than the men, Mrs. Graham; I always said it. Now I know it's true."

"Sit down, won't you, Mr. Henriques?"

At last the invitation passed Mrs. Graham's lips and the pair beside her imagined they saw smooth sailing ahead. Henriques pulled a chair over close to them, engaged in a rather tame conversation about sunset on the sea, the distant islands, the tropical colors of water, land and sky, and carefully avoided any reference to their destination until the old lady gushed:

"Katherine tells me that you have been everywhere; have you ever been to Nassau?"

"Yes," he replied curtly.

"Do you know, I suspect it is the strangest place in the world, so solitary, set off here in the middle of the ocean like an exile from home."

Henriques started at the word "exile" in connection with Nassau, but, quickly reassuring himself, he replied:

"No, no, that's a mistaken idea, quite wrong.

You know, Mrs. Graham, people are just about the same in all parts of the world. Those who live on islands may have a narrow vision of life, because they know less of the earth on which life exists. They look out into the east, west, north and south and see only water and sky; the boundary of their little earth is the coast-line around their island. If they are islanders they care little what transpires beyond their horizon. But the mainland people are the same. They have a broader vision because they have a more expanded life and see more people and things. Still the old heart of humanity throbs at about the same pace on mainland or island. The good and the bad are to be found everywhere. They inhabit the land, and I doubt not that much the same order of things exists in the sea. There are probably good and bad fish, contented and discontented fish; big and little fish, brave fish and cowardly fish."

"And devil-fish?" laughed Katherine as a tender rebuke for his sudden fit of eloquence.

"Katherine!" said the old lady sharply, "how did you dare to say that after Mr. Henriques' beautiful words! That was one of the prettiest speeches I ever heard in my life. No wonder Miss Belmont enjoys hearing you talk."

Katherine and Henriques winced beneath the suspected sarcasm of her last remark.

"Oh, you needn't smile, you two," she continued. "I have noticed it and Father has noticed it. I said to him back in St. Augustine that of all the friends Katherine had met in Florida she seemed to enjoy your company most.

Yes, I am free to admit it. You both smile? Well, now I can see how it all happened. She loved to hear you talk."

"It is generally said that a man doesn't have a chance to talk when there is a woman around," suggested Katherine.

"Well, a man can have a chance when there are two women," declared Mrs. Graham. "Mr. Henriques, do tell us about Nassau. Is it a city of negroes, as they say it is, ten of them to every white?"

"The inhabitants of Nassau have much negro blood in their veins, Mrs. Graham; but they are much different from the negroes one sees in America. They possess more of the true African traits."

"How interesting," gurgled the old lady.

"There are many of them, however, who are highly educated, graduates of Oxford and other great Universities, and that sort of thing. On the other hand, the majority are an ignorant, indolent lot, as illiterate as a child from the interior of Africa."

"They must be repulsive," suggested the old lady, "absolutely repulsive!"

"On the contrary, they are not; no, they are interesting and entertaining to the tourist. They are certainly picturesque. I have been on good terms with many of them and have found that they have big hearts full of love and sympathy."

"Love and sympathy in a negro, Mr. Henriques? You really don't mean that!"

"Pardon me, madam. I do."

"And you actually like the black creatures?"

"Yes."

"God will reward you for it, some day," said Katherine calmly, but with a tone that Henriques knew came from the depths of her heart. To him it was a word of assurance and hope, a promise of future happiness. Reward? He dared not think of it, for Katherine knew what would be the greatest reward for anything he might have done in life. He fancied she was reading his thoughts and by a neatly clothed and disguised sentence was answering him, although Mrs. Graham found in her words an absolutely different meaning.

"I suppose we should be more charitable," said the old lady, after she had recovered from the mental shock of Katherine's words, to which she assumed to pay no attention.

"Charity? Mrs. Graham, it is not charity. All men are equal and it is not charity for one of them to love another."

"Well, my dear, we all have opinions on such matters; mine, I believe, was formed for me before I was able to think for myself. I was taught as a child that a negro was a slave, a remnant of humanity upon whom God had placed a curse in the form of his black skin. My impressions from early teaching have not changed from personal observation. The negro and I have nothing in common and we shall never have."

"Never!" said Katherine with a determination more forceful than tactful. Silence followed the word. Henriques studied her closely and the old lady watched them both. Fortunately, a moment

later the steward came on deck and rang the dinner gong, the sound of which always lightens the spirits of ocean travelers, and, either through its mystic influence or because Katherine realized that her conduct was not up to her own standard of cleverness, she laughed merrily, made some flippant remark about the effect of salt water on appetites, and at the suggestion of Mrs. Graham they started for the lower deck.

Dinner on the little boat was an informal affair, calculated to appease hunger rather than display gowns with pagan ostentation.

Henriques accompanied the two ladies to the table and was surprised to observe that the old lady talked little at table, but seemed to eat everything. This pleased him, for he fancied that if history repeated itself it was the most certain method of making it necessary for the elderly dame to seek her apartments soon after the meal. He remembered the old proverb aboard ocean boats, to the effect that a hearty first meal saves the company the expense of serving the next three or four. The sea was causing the little steamer to roll about considerably as they left the table and started for the deck. Mrs. Graham staggered and caught hold of a chair, although Henriques was doing his utmost to support her.

"I must lie down, my dear," she whispered to Katherine, who had difficulty in suppressing the smile.

"I am usually such a good sailor," sighed the old lady, "but this is a pretty severe test."

"You had better lie down, Mrs. Graham; then you'll feel better in the evening. The tropical

sky, you know, my dear madam, you must see it! Nothing in the world like a Spring evening in the Bahamas."

She consented to be taken to her state-room, the stewardess was called, the usual questions asked, and before long her head reposed on a pillow, the most welcome pillow that the old lady had ever known. Twilight had suddenly passed and it was the dark hour before glorious starlight. There is but a glimpse of northern twilight in Caribbean waters. After the flaming sun sinks beneath the western clouds the mantle of night falls like a curtain and leaves all in blackness until the silver disks appear in the heavens.

Jean Henriques lighted a cigarette and paced the deck. The other passengers were walking to and fro, but he did not notice them. He hoped no one would recognize him and thought he was safe, for men at his time of life change rapidly in personal appearance and it had been four years since he left the little island city. When he left Nassau he went to New York, but the unconquerable desire in man to return to the zone of his nativity, the "call of the blood," led him towards the South. He yielded to the desire and went to Mexico, and finally drifted to Florida, running little or no risk of being seen by anyone from Nassau who might recognize him; for although Florida contingent is constantly drifting towards the Bahamas, the island people rarely cross over to the peninsula. Arriving in Florida, he drifted from town to town, and soon the indolent life of the youth crept back

upon him and he was again a child of the tropics. While thus lounging about and seeking amusement he fell in with the pleasure-loving crowd at St. Augustine, and there made the acquaintance of the group into which Katherine Belmont threw her fate when she left Cleveland.

While musing of the past and dreaming of the future, Henriques was suddenly prompted by some mental influence to turn about, and, as he did so, he saw Katherine Belmont emerging from the salon to the deck. He went to meet her, and, taking her arm, led her to a quiet retreat on the hurricane deck where they could not be seen by the other passengers and where they could dream in the soft, scented, cool air that blows over the Atlantic from the flower fields of Cuba and the other islands in the Western group.

"Mrs. Graham thinks she will be more comfortable in the state-room," began Katherine.

"Thank Heaven," sighed Henriques. "We have much to talk about, my dear, and the time is short."

"Now, are you going to be serious in this glorious starlight? No, let us dream to-night."

He caught her hand and kissed it fervently.

"Oh, would to God that we might ever dream in this same starlight!"

Their words came with difficulty, but each understood what words could not tell. The touch of her hand thrilled him and made him tremble like a modest boy; and she, so accustomed to flattery and brilliant words of admiration, was shocked to silence by the warm breath

of her lover, whose lips were pressed against her cheeks.

"Someone will see us," she whispered, as Henriques drew her tightly, although she willingly lent herself to his embrace. "Someone might be looking, and think of the consequences!"

"There are no consequences," he replied, holding her tighter and pressing more kisses to her cheeks.

"But Jean—" she hesitated—"you know all, I have never deceived you. There is no hope for us; for I have promised to be the wife of another man."

"You told me before I left you in the garden at Miami that you would consider my proposal and that you would give me an answer in Nassau."

"But this is not Nassau!"

"When morning comes again Nassau will be in sight, the accursed island that I despise more than I can tell you. It was only you, only you, my dear, who could cause Jean Henriques to board a steamer bound for Nassau. My darling, you should tell me now; if there is a word of hope for me in this awful sea of despair. Refuse me and there is no joy ahead. If you but knew—ah, God, if you but knew! Tell me, Katherine, don't you love me?"

She answered with a kiss and clutched his hands passionately, but that was not enough for him. It seemed to him that his future hung in the balance. Sailing on the waves that lap the shores of those tiny points of coral that protrude

through the blue and are called the Bahamas, hearing the name of Nassau spoken by every passer-by, and knowing that only one brief night lay between him and the scene that should have been dear to him but which he loathed, seemed to dazzle his brain. He became impetuous, but, conquering himself, merely held Katherine's hand.

"Tell me," he said, in a tone half imperative and half pleading, "tell me, Katherine, what are you going to do? Will you attempt to leave me and go to live with a man you do not love, or will you come with me, be my wife and spend your life in my arms?"

"Jean, we are strangers, when viewed as the world sees men and women."

"What do we care for the world? Why should we care for what people say? Listen, my dear, listen to what I say and allow your womanly instincts to go beyond my words and read my thoughts. We must live for one another in this world. We must make it a paradise for ourselves and forget what other people think and what they say."

"Still, I have a duty to perform." Katherine hesitated purposely, for she was weighing his words. They aroused a suspicion in her mind that startled her; still she fancied that it might all be her own imagination, and, reassured, she looked up into his face.

"What is your answer?" he asked again.

"That I love you, but that we can never be man and wife."

"Katherine, don't make me say it! You have deceived others but you will not deceive me. I know, my darling girl, I know all that you are hiding in your heart and which you think the world will never know!"

Henriques expected an outburst and was ready for it, but the effect of his words was far different.

"And you?" she asked simply.

"Yes, I, too, have my secret," he replied.

"You told me you were a Portuguese!"

"I am."

"You told me you came from Mexico."

"I did."

"Then why, Jean, why are you afraid to go to Nassau?"

"That you shall know when we reach Nassau."

"No, no, I will not wait. You demand my answer now; you shall give me yours."

"My dear, don't threaten me. I have tried to plead with you, but I have not frightened you, not attempted to intimidate you."

"And you want my answer to-night?"

"I must have it before that accursed island comes in sight."

"Then tell me, why are you afraid?"

"Because I am hated there, dear girl, because I am despised, if the people remember me. If fate is kind, they will not remember. We change beyond recollection sometimes in four years."

"Why do they hate you, Jean?"

"Not for what I have done, but for my father, my mother, my grandfather and all!"

He was trembling like an aspen leaf in the wind. It seemed to him that his heartstrings were being rudely vibrated and he feared that he was about to tell the secret of his life, the secret that he had spent years in guarding more jealously than life itself.

"Do men suffer for their fathers' sins?" she asked distrustfully.

"Men are cursed by their fathers, Katherine Belmont, and you know that as well as I do. I dare not face the people who know me in Nassau, any more than you can face the people who know you in New Orleans."

"What you—" She started to rise, but he drew her back.

"My God, don't start like that, my darling! I know all, but I love you. I know all about it, but you, of all the earth, were created to make life a paradise for me; otherwise from this moment it becomes a hell!"

"You know all about it?" she gasped.

"All," he replied simply.

"But you would not betray me, Jean, you would not, would you? You would not ruin my life and all my ambitions?"

"Not if you consent to become my wife."

"Only friends, good friends, lovers to the ends of our lives, if you choose, but not man and wife."

"It must be man and wife," he declared defiantly.

"Then you threaten to expose me to the Grahams?" she queried, with a half-mocking inflection.

"I merely say that I shall never love another woman. You must become my wife, to live and die with me."

"'Must' is a strange word for a man to use to the woman he really loves, when he asks her to become his wife."

"I repeat it, you must become my wife. Yes, I would make it impossible for you to marry a—well, any man not of your own race, or, must I say it? a white man."

Katherine tried to break away from his grasp, but he held her.

"Don't be foolish; think well what you do."

"I shall call for help."

"No, no, you would not do that, Katherine, you love me. You came into my life by some strange freak of fate, and now we must remain together. Promise me, or I shall go to Mrs. Graham and tell her. Her husband and son know all by this time."

"You! Oh, this is wicked of you; but they would not believe you. They will believe me and brand you as the worst liar on earth, a wicked creature who libels and disgraces the woman he loved but could not marry!"

"Ah, God! Must I speak plainer yet? Will you tempt and force me further?"

"What more is there to tell? You have said it all."

"No, no, I beseech you listen well; if you have the power to judge between the good and the devil in a man, put that power to the test. I have told you of your own curse, Katherine; I have flaunted in your face the shame of your

birth. Negro bloods flows in your veins, but worse than that in mine. The blood of the black skin is yours, but the blood of the unclean is mine."

"The unclean? I don't understand."

"You do not? Think well of it."

"No, tell me what it is—the unclean."

"Katherine, I am a leper!"

She shuddered and fought desperately to get away from him, but his grip was the grip of steel.

"Don't be rash," he pleaded. "Cry out, and when you reach Nassau they will send us both to the awful home of a living death, the leper-house on the hill. Ah, I know it well—my father, mother, brother, sisters are all there!"

"But I—they would not, could not send me there. You are trying to frighten me with the threats of a wild man!"

She broke into tears and sobbed violently. "Ah, God, if I had never seen you!"

"Then you would have deceived them until the day when they all turned upon you to shame you for your own crime. But now, do we understand each other? To-morrow we can make our escape from Nassau, if you consent to be mine forever. It may be years, ah, many years, of bliss before we will know the torture of death. When death faces us in this curse of hell we will face it bravely for the joys that we have known together."

"But I?"

"You are a leper, too!"

"They say that one may not contract the disease by the touch of a hand, or even the lips."

"But you remember, my dear, you remember the hotel garden at Miami? Ah, God forgive me! I was a man before I was a leper!"

THE BORDERLAND OF DISGRACE

Chapter IX

CHAPTER IX.

THE BORDERLAND OF DISGRACE.

When George Graham and his father returned to their rooms at the Royal Palm Hotel in Miami they were satisfied that Alphonse de Goncourt, or the man who had so represented himself, was dead. After the excitement of their thrilling experience had abated they were willing to accept Morgan's story as a certainty, although they had been reluctant about doing so while they were with him. Passing through the crowd of anxious faces at the dock convinced them that there had been some accident on the bay. Knowing well that the little boat had tossed about during their sail towards the open sea, and realizing that the fury of the waves had rapidly increased while they were on the rock, and that it was only a stauncher craft that saved them from a night of lonesomeness or despair, they felt certain that the man who had attempted to ruin them would do so no more.

"But how can we avoid a scandal?" asked Graham as he paced the floor of their room and seemed annoyed that George sat calmly looking out of the window, as he believed, towards the treacherous bay, but in reality towards Nassau, where he knew that Katherine Belmont was staying with his mother.

"You know, George, it would be the death of your mother if this thing got into the newspapers," he continued impatiently. "The papers up home would be glad to get hold of just this kind of a story; they say it's what the people want."

"Well, the people won't get this, father. Some way, I feel that the whole affair is over. The man who wished to make me unhappy, you, mother and Katherine unhappy—well, he has apparently gone to his reward through some agency that we cannot explain."

"But we'll have to say something," retorted the father.

"We'll give all the information the authorities want, that is, about this man asking us to go for a sail, then leaving us on the island, and later meeting his death by shipwreck. But as to this latter detail we know nothing and will be obliged to say nothing. We can easily make it appear that we went ashore to gather shells and that the whole operation was an accident pure and simple, or we can suggest that the man was insane. I don't imagine that he was a man whose friends would have much to say to contradict any statement we might make. Morgan and his men say they saw the boat capsize; we will say that he left us on a rock before the accident. There it is in a nutshell."

"A good deal will depend upon this man Morgan," suggested the elder Graham. "I don't have implicit faith in him."

"I do!" declared George. "He strikes me as a man who can be trusted. You would have

done better to pin your faith to a man like him than to the strange, the extraordinary group into which you evidently fell a willing prey. How about some of the others, this Madam Du Laurence, for instance; do you think she is still at the hotel?"

"No idea. I haven't seen her since your mother left."

George had crossed the room and already had the telephone at his ear. He asked the hotel clerk if the woman who called herself Madame Du Laurence was still a guest there and received the reply that she had left the hostelry.

"I imagine," observed George, as he hung up the receiver and walked back to his chair, "I imagine that you will not see any of these people again. They have evidently played whatever little game they had to play and have gone to Cuba, Jamaica or to the West Coast for the purpose of finding new victims. You know they can never operate long in one place and escape detection. You are sure, father, there is no money transaction with these people of which you have not told me? They usually play for money."

"Not a penny," said the old man with a sigh of relief.

"All the worse, then," said George. "It is pretty plain, then that they were playing for a heavier stake. It was Katherine they hoped to ensnare. Now about the Turk and the man you said called himself a Portuguese?"

"I have seen none of them since I received that awful letter."

"That letter is now a thing of the past, father, and we will blot it from our memory, lest in an unguarded moment Katherine should learn of it from one of us. She must never know."

"But how shall we account for your coming to Florida?"

"I shall return, and she need never know that I have been here; or we might go to Nassau, you and I, and surprise them, telling them that you waited here at Miami to give me time to make the trip down, and that we took the first steamer over."

The elder Graham continued to pace the floor until forcibly led to a chair by his son and told to calm himself. At the same time there was a tap at the door, to which George responded.

"Ah, Mr. Morgan," he said cordially. "We were waiting for a telephone call to meet you somewhere. Thank you so much for coming to us. We'll try to be a little more hospitable than when you made your last visit."

The three forced a smile, and all sat down, puffing cigars and waiting for one of the three to open the conversation upon the real topic at issue.

"Friends, were you with this man de Goncourt?" asked Mr. Morgan.

"No—that is, not exactly, friends. My father, it seems, had known him several days, perhaps weeks, and when he presented me, the first suggestion was a sail. We accepted, went out there and wanted to gather some coral and shells and asked him to let us ashore. He was cutting up some fancy capers with the sail, I suppose, and—

You know more about the rest of the story than we do."

"Well, now you say you are not his friends, I'll tell you something," said Morgan, slowly, and apparently watching their faces closely as he spoke. "There's a cloud of suspicion about this man, anyway. We should speak gently of the dead; but since I got back to the hotel I have heard from several different sources that the man was an impostor. He was not French at all; but, on the contrary, was a mulatto from New Orleans who had made money by some questionable means and then went out into the world flaunting his Ethiopian skin before the very eyes of white men who failed to detect his negro blood."

"A negro, then, this man de Goncourt?" interrupted the elder Graham.

"No, not a negro, but a man with negro blood in his veins, which is worse," replied Morgan, emphatically.

"And did he succeed in fooling people all his life?" asked George, for the purpose of keeping up the conversation.

"Well, he kept pretty close to Northern people, who would be the least likely to suspect him. Of course his death has occasioned all sorts of silly gossip around the hotel. I have heard several conflicting stories already. But it is of no consequence to any of us, I suppose, for the man is dead, and I guess it will be plain enough to any person who investigated the facts that he was the victim of a shipwreck. That reminds me; have any reporters been here to see you?"

The Grahams, father and son, were shocked at the suggestion and showed it by nervousness.

"Reporters! No. Why should they want to see us?" asked George, excitedly.

"Well, you know how reporters are, Mr. Graham, and I merely wondered. There are several of them here at the hotel, it seems, down from the North on a holiday. As I came up just now they were talking to the clerk and endeavoring to swoop down on any details in the life of this man, like vultures on carrion."

"We will refuse to see them," declared the elder Graham, rising from his chair and shouting excitedly.

"On the contrary, sir, if you will permit me to offer a suggestion," said Morgan, quietly, "I should advise you to see them, evade their personal inquiries; tell them, as you have told me, that you had little acquaintance with the fellow, and that you went ashore to gather shells just before the waves overturned his boat. It is always better to satisfy the newspaper men. When they get their noses turned towards what they consider news they follow it into the secret recesses of a man's heart. This particular crowd of men seem to have been reared in the sensational or yellow school of journalism of New York, and you know what that means."

George and his father exchanged quick glances after they had followed Morgan closely. It was apparent to both of them that he either knew or suspected that they had a deeper interest in de Goncourt than they had admitted to him. Before committing himself, however, and

for the purpose of gaining information, George asked:

"Do you think these reporters will come to us at all?"

"Assuredly, yes. I thought they might have been here already. You see, they probably consider it a good piece of news. People are so morbid; they like just that sort of thing."

"Then I agree with you, perhaps, that we should tell them as we have told you," reflected George.

"But don't tell them anything further," suggested Morgan. "They have heard a lot of crazy rumors in the hotel lobby, you know."

"Rumors of what?" asked the elder Graham, unable to suppress his desire to hear the worst.

"Oh, I might as well make a clean breast of it; you know I feel that we three are pretty well acquainted after our little experience out there to-day, so I feel free to tell you. It is gossiped around the lobby that this man de Goncourt made violent protestations of his love for a Miss Belmont, who was with your party, if I mistake not?"

Graham bowed his head in the affirmative.

"Well, the story goes that she repulsed him and went away to Nassau with a Portuguese chap, who was also stopping here at the hotel. Henriques, I believe they say his name was. This man de Goncourt, it seems, had told of the affair in the lobby last night and had sworn revenge on the man whom he said he had befriended and who had won where he had lost. You see, it makes the thing a little awkward,

you being left out there on a rock, then he being drowned and all; for it is said that Miss Belmont had some close connection with your family. Of course you know how gossip travels, and you really understand what these reporters believe they have unearthed. As for this man de Goncourt, it doesn't seem that he's worth mentioning at all; but the alleged romance behind him would make a pretty warm story in the New York papers."

George and his father had both risen from their chairs and were walking about nervously as they closely followed each word that escaped Morgan's mouth.

"Now you understand my position in telling you this, gentlemen. I want to assist you in avoiding any notoriety. You will see, also, that I have a selfish motive, too; for I want to avoid any notoriety in the affair myself. When the reporters spoke to me about the thing, I gave them a plain, matter-of-fact statement of how we had seen a yacht turn turtle and how, when we went out to it, we saw two men on the island and brought them back to Miami."

"My God!" exclaimed George. "What on earth can we do to avoid all this? We must do something, Morgan; we cannot talk to these men. I am in no condition to do so. My father cannot, and yet you say they will come. What can we do about it?"

"Would you like to have me speak for you? Anything that I can do to be of service will give me great pleasure, I assure you."

"Yes," said George, bounding towards Mor-

gan and extending his hand. "We'll leave it all to you. Both of us are too unstrung. Tell them it's a damnable lie if they say anything about Miss Belmont in connection with this drowned dog."

"She had no love affair with him, then?" asked Morgan, innocently.

"Why, man, it's the rankest kind of libel to allow this gossip to spread."

"You are sure she never went out with this man enough to give any grounds for suspicion? The clerk says he believes they went to a picnic party together up the river the other day."

"What if she did?" broke in the elder Graham, who felt that he must come to his son's rescue. "There were several others in the party. There was an elderly woman—Madame Du Laurence—and—"

"Better not mention her," said Morgan. "She has been mixed up in the affair, too. They say she was a sort of accomplice for this man de Goncourt in some shady enterprises."

"And as for them having gone to Nassau together— My God! My mother went with Miss Belmont," said George, with a superlative effort to make his defense plain.

Morgan rose to go; but George seized his hand eagerly and with tears in his eyes, pleaded:

"Be careful, my friend, be careful what you do and what you say. It seems to me that my life and the lives of my father and mother hang in the balance and depend upon you. A word might bring ruin and disgrace to all of us, and

I am in no mental condition to weigh my words. We are in your hands and we trust you."

Morgan hung his head and seemed to ponder at the obligation thrust upon him.

"May we trust you?" asked George, as his father grasped Morgan's other hand and the two peered into his face for a reply. He hesitated.

"May we?" repeated George.

Just then there was a knock at the door and George answered it by calling out, "Come in," too intent upon what he was doing to drop Morgan's hand.

"A message, sir," said a bell-boy.

"Here, give it here, quick," commanded George, breathlessly, and seemingly mindful of some impending calamity. The elder Graham sank into a chair with a sigh, and Morgan stood riveted to the place where he had stood when battling with his conscience when pressed for a reply to George Graham's petition for assistance in his hour of need.

George read the message, turned white, and staggered towards his father "It's a lie," he stammered; "it's another trap, another lie!" Holding out the yellow slip of paper to the reluctant and trembling hand of his father, he suddenly brought it back before his eyes and re-read it.

"Shall I read it?" he asked. "Mr. Morgan is already in our confidence, and I think he should see this, another infamous detail of this miserable plot to ruin us."

"I will go, if—" suggested Morgan, making no move.

"No—stay! Listen. This is signed with my mother's name and comes from Nassau. It is addressed to you, father, and says: 'Katherine gone with Henriques. Awful news for you. Leave for Miami to-night's boat. Arrive early to-morrow morning.' "

The three were silent. George was paralyzed when he heard the words that seemed much worse than when read; his father was stunned and Morgan was astounded.

"My hand, gentlemen," said Morgan, after some hesitation and with a display of emotion. "I was never before ashamed of my profession. You have been frank with me and have made a confidant of me; now I have a confession to make."

George looked as if he was ready to spring at Morgan's throat, but he merely clenched his fists when he stood and listened.

"You have shamed me by the confidence you have placed in me, and now I swear to you I shall do my utmost to help you out of this thing in any way that lies in my power. I told you before that I should do so. It was a lie. When you held my hand and asked me if you could trust me, I was ashamed of myself and couldn't answer you. Gentlemen, I am the reporter for the New York daily whose matter is sent by leased wires all over the country. It was a lucky hour for me, I thought, when I went out in a launch and rescued you. Then when I began to play the role of a detective and ferreted the whole thing out, I thought I had done a clever job. It looked to me like a piece of

work that the boys in Park Row would call brilliant. But believe me, gentlemen, here's my hand. This thing will never go into the papers if I can keep it out."

He extended his hand to the Grahams, father and son, and they grasped them, although both were too dazed to realize all that was taking place.

"I'll go now. You want to be alone. I told you a lie, gentlemen. There are no other reporters in the hotel, so far as I know; and I believe the little gossip about the lobby will be forgotten to-morrow. I shall see you again soon, if you want me, call Room 412 and I am at your service."

Morgan left the room hurriedly and closed the door behind him. George let the cable message fall to the floor and looked into his father's eyes for consolation.

"Poor boy! My dear child, I am afraid—yes, I believe it now—we have reached the bottom of it all at last. Katherine—"

"Don't," interrupted George. "Don't speak of her."

Then folding his hands over his eyes, he fell upon the bed and sobbed like a boy. The old man looked out of the window towards Biscayne Bay and wished from the depths of his heart that they never had left their happy home in Cleveland to find the milder climate but bitter experiences which came to them in Florida.

THE LEOPARD'S SPOTS

Chapter X

CHAPTER X.

THE LEOPARD'S SPOTS.

When the steamer from the Bahamas entered the port of Miami early the next morning George Graham ran up the gang-plank as soon as it was lowered and anxiously looked over the heads of the passengers, who stood huddled in the passage-way, anxious to disembark. George failed to recognize his mother in the crowd and went to the salon to inquire of the stewardess. He found her assisting his mother from her state-room, and as the two recognized one another they fell into a tight embrace. Mrs. Graham wept softly and stroked his hair as she kissed his forehead.

"My poor boy!" she moaned. "My poor boy! What shall we do? Oh, what can we do?"

George kissed his mother tenderly and whispered a word to her that caused her to dry her tears.

She turned and shook the hand of the stewardess. "My boy, you will never know what a comfort this dear woman has been to me on the trip over. It seems to me that I would have died without her."

"Thank you, stewardess, thank you very much," echoed George, as he pressed the way along towards the landing.

"We shall not forget you," said Mrs. Graham, as they left the boat and reached the dock.

"Yes, we shall," remarked George. "Mother, we want to forget it all—this Florida—and—" He hesitated, and his mother sighed "Poor, poor boy!"

"We must forget everything," he declared decisively.

"My dear boy, when you know all about it your heart will break. It has nearly killed me. Your father? Where is he?"

"At the hotel, mother."

"He sent for you, then?"

"Yes."

"But how did you get here so quickly? I only sent him word last night."

"Wait, mother; we cannot talk about that here."

He escorted her to a carriage and then hustled back to see to the luggage. This was soon piled up before him, examined by the customs officers, and consigned to the hotel, after which he returned to his mother's side, bravely took her in his arms and told her not to weep, and in a few moments they were driving through the avenues of palms that leads to the Royal Palm Hotel.

When father, mother and son first met in their rooms at the hotel, there was a rapid exchange of endearing words, all of which were of sympathy and regret; sympathy for the son and regret that they had left their home in the North to expose themselves to the experiences that had resulted so miserably. Mrs. Graham was

eager to tell all that had happened at Nassau, but her woman's curiosity led her first to inquire how it was that George had reached Florida on such short notice. The elder Graham explained that he had received a strange, anonymous letter before she and Katherine went to Nassau; that he had sent for George and that the two men had been endeavoring to trace its origin when the message came from Nassau that proved the truth and foundation of their fears. Graham showed the letter and the three perused it, word by word, but making no comment until George finally suggested:

"Now, mother, we have waited long enough. Tell us all about it and we will know all there is for us to know."

"Here is another letter," said Mrs. Graham, as she pulled an envelope from the opening of her dress waist. It is a continuation of that which you have, but it is more conclusive. It tells the truth, while your letter was a threat or an attempt to blackmail."

"Let me see it," burst out George, eagerly grasping the letter.

"Read it aloud, my boy; let your father hear it, too. That letter was left on my dresser at the hotel. Katherine said she was going out for a drive with that man Henriques, who was here at Miami, and who went over on the boat with us. We went down to the veranda together and Henriques met us there. Katherine went back up to the room and left this, joining Henriques and entering a carriage with him while I remained at the hotel. I waited and waited for

them to come back, but they did not come. Hours passed, and finally I made inquiry at the hotel and found that Mr. Henriques' baggage had been sent to the wharf before he left the hotel. The porter said he took either the steamer for Cuba or the steamer for New York, both of which were in port at the same time. Then I went up to my room and found this letter. It explains it all, I guess. Read it, George, and see what you think—or shall I read it?"

"No, let me read it," he retorted, with quivering voice, and then taking the rather bulky letter, he read aloud from the printed page:

"Dear Mrs. Graham: When this letter reaches you I shall be on the ocean. It will be of no avail to inquire which way I have gone. You will never see me again. If this action seems strange to you, let me remind you that it will be your usual stupidity that blinds your eyes to the truth. As for George, I never loved him, although I believed that in him I saw the means of escape from a life of shame. You seemed to promote my ambitions. It is common gossip among your friends in Cleveland that you were the matchmaker. On several occasions our engagement would have been broken off but for your insistent interference. But how you would have suffered some day when the awful truth was revealed to you. Despite my sufferings and the injustice that the whole world has meted out to me, I can pity you when I think of what might have been the culmination of your ambitious plans to marry me to your son.

"They said in Cleveland that I was beautiful.

I was beautiful compared to those painted faces that smiled upon me in jealousy. Nature gave me a pretty face, which caused me to flaunt myself boldly among your silly friends and acquaintances. How I revelled in the deception! They entertained me, flattered me, and perhaps feared me, for if there were any who had the brains that are granted to ordinary mortals, they must have detected at some time or other how I loathed all of them and despised all of you. It was in my blood. It could not have been otherwise had I desired it.

"To be plainer still, let me remind you of that which you should have guessed long ago. There is a great secret in my life. I am branded with a mark that nature placed upon me—a mark that I must carry to the grave. My life has been a deception; I have been a living lie and might have remained so had not another come to share my deception with me. I have left you and yours to become the wife of Jean Henriques. He, too, has a secret, and together we shall be happy in the thought of our conquests.

"You will doubtless never know how inseparable is the tie that binds us. His curse is linked with mine, and any effort on your part to follow us and punish us for making you our very willing prey would not only disgrace you, but would put an everlasting stain upon the name and character of your son.

"Fools! All of you! I told you that I was the daughter of Southern aristocrats. That blinded you. You never thought to doubt my word, and yet I despised you all the time for your stupidity.

Even when I realized your attempted kindness I cursed you and yours. You wanted to call me your daughter. That often repeated desire caused the spirit of my mother to cry out within me for revenge. My birth was an outrage, and a demon has been crying for me to avenge the sin that gave me life. And how sweet and speedily came that revenge!

"I do not even ask forgiveness. Were it not for the blushes that would come to my own cheeks I would like to go back to your silly snobs in Cleveland and tell them all how I fooled them. Katherine Belmont, the negress! Would they flatter her and beg for her smiles? Ask yourself. Ask them, if you are brave enough.

"As for myself I blot you all from my memory, except that I shall treasure all my life those days, weeks, months and years, when I lived in happiness that was not born of any vain love for conquest and social prominence, but of the sweet, inner satisfaction that I had made dupes of all of you.

"Tell George to be brave. The thought of his wasted words of love upon the mocking ears of a negress might drive him insane. I don't want him to be insane. I hope he may retain his mind for a hundred years, always remembering that he caressed a woman with Ethiopian blood in her veins, that he asked her to be his wife, the mother of his children and the companion of his life.

"I wish you all good health. That will permit you to think always of the woman who curses you with every breath. KATHERINE."

George sank down in a chair and threw the

letter on the floor. Mrs. Graham wept audibly and her husband brushed tears from his eyes.

"It's all true, then," he said, hoarsely.

George hesitated a moment and then crossed the room and took down the telephone receiver.

"What are you going to do?" asked his mother.

"Wait and see, mother—wait and see!" he replied calmly, and then talked with the hotel clerk.

They listened to what he said, but to Mrs. Graham it was all a mystery. He asked that a bell-boy find Morgan, the New York yachtsman, and send him at once to Mr. Graham's rooms.

Not a word was spoken by the three until a rap at the door announced the coming of the man who had promised to be a friend.

George grasped his hand firmly as he entered and asked him if he was willing to save a family from disgrace. He replied that he was and was presented to Mrs. Graham. He clasped her hand, and, as the old lady continued weeping, he said simply: "You may depend on me, madam; you can trust me!"

Young Graham and Morgan left the room together, and in a quiet retreat of the hotel cafe the former related the horrible story of what had transpired the day before.

"We are prominent people in Cleveland," pleaded George. "Publicity of this affair would ruin my life and send my father and mother to their graves."

Morgan pulled out a pencil and pad from his pocket. Then hesitating before writing, he

asked: "You are certain that this woman has gone forever?"

"Forever," replied George.

Then Morgan wrote hastily and did not speak until he had scrawled his name across the bottom of the page.

"The boys in the office will see that the association carries this dispatch through Ohio," said he. "Your friends will see it. They know that you were called here suddenly, as you told me yesterday. No further explanation will be demanded of you."

He handed over the pad, and George read a brief news dispatch, dated from Miami.

"Katherine Belmont, a prominent society girl of Cleveland, O., who was spending the winter in Florida with Mr. and Mrs. Henry Graham of the same city, was drowned in Biscayne Bay by the capsizing of the yacht Jupiter, in which she and Mr. Graham were the guests of the owner, Alphonse de Goncourt, a tourist in Florida. De Goncourt was also drowned. Graham was rescued by a party of New Yorkers on the steam yacht Tropics, who had witnessed the accident from the wharf."

The wires soon carried the message. George Graham held the hand of Morgan with a grasp that told more than words could tell, and the day afterwards Mr. and Mrs. Graham and their son took a train for their Ohio home, where they were met at the station by their friends.

In Cleveland it was reported that searchers along the coast of Biscayne Bay were unable to find the bodies of de Goncourt and Miss Bel-

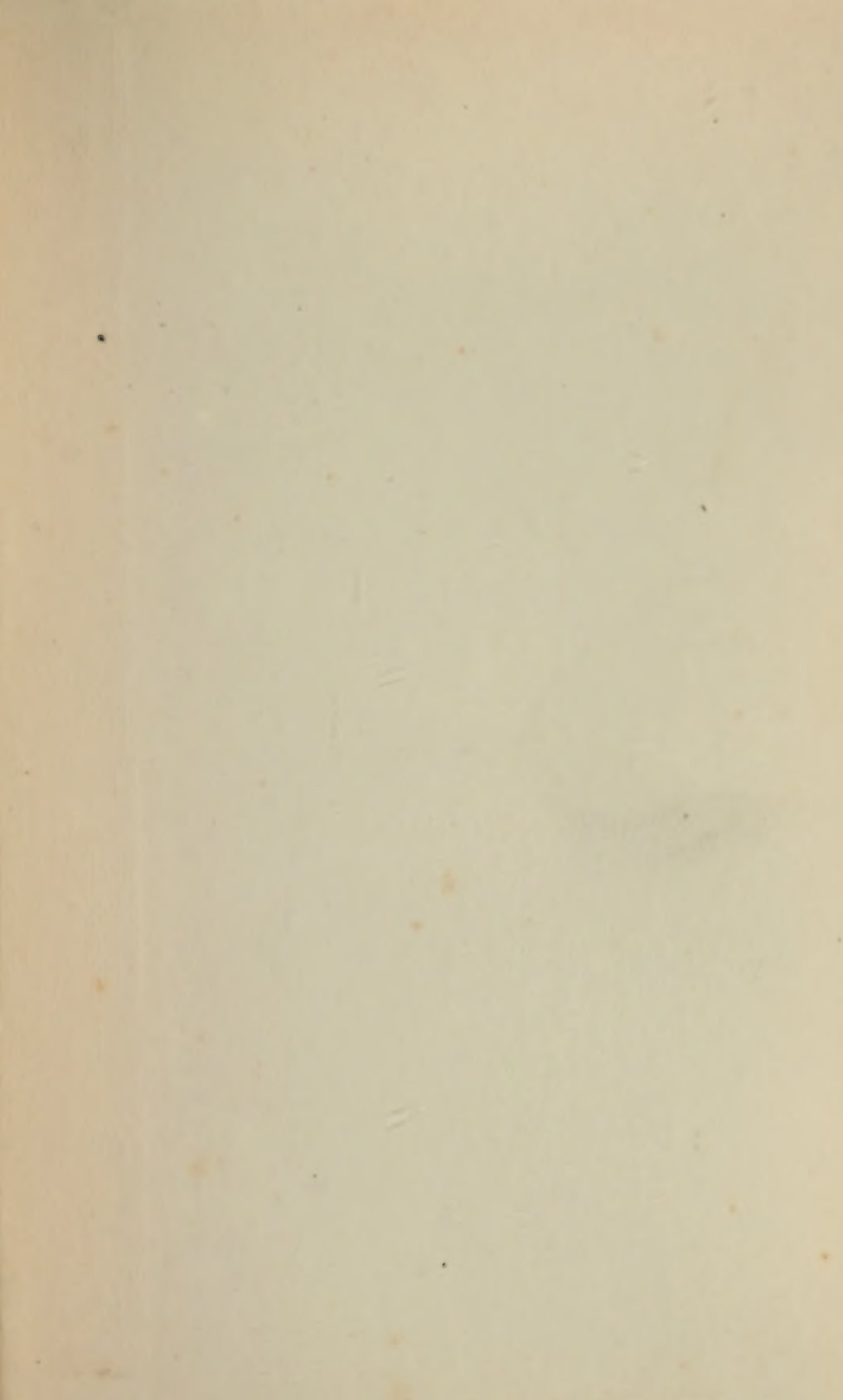
mont, although George Graham's father offered a liberal reward for their recovery.

Those who were close to the family surrounded Mrs. Graham with pretexts of sympathy and urged that in her great sorrow she find consolation in the fact that her husband had been rescued as by a miracle from the vicious waves of the sea.

* * * * *

Spring came, summer, autumn; and although none of them remembered it, a year from the night that George Graham talked with Miriam Longworth at Mrs. Sorghum's "purple dinner" there was a wedding at one of the big Euclid avenue churches, attended by the elite and oldest families. All the former friends of Katherine Belmont were there. The gossips commented that this was "a real love match," while everyone knew that the ambitious Mrs. Graham had engaged her son to his former fiancée.

George Graham and the beautiful wife, who occasionally shocks society by a note written on the typewriter, to which she became devoted when a stenographer, live in a cottage not far from the parental roof. They may never know, unless this book chances to fall into their hands, that the names of Mr. and Mrs. Jean Henriques, under a disguise, were recently printed in the papers of Cleveland. They dwell not far from the wrecked city of Kingston, in Jamaica. The earthquake that devastated the city brought them from their plantation, and a correspondent paid them a glowing tribute for their heroic work among the afflicted and poverty-stricken natives.



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